THE WEALTHY JANITOR

The Billion-Dollar Mistake That Taught Me
How Regular People Actually Get Rich

by
Rich Abbott

by Rich Abbott

DEDICATION

To everyone who's ever made a financial mistake and thought it was too late to start over.

It's not.

— *Rich Abbott*

The events and conversations in this book have been set down to the best of the author's ability, although some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals. Sam Thornton is a composite character based on real people, real events, and real financial principles.

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PREFACE

The Conversation That Changed Everything

I almost didn't write this book.

Not because I didn't have a story to tell. I had plenty of story—most of it painful, all of it expensive, none of it particularly flattering.

I almost didn't write it because I didn't think anyone would want to hear from a failure.

See, this isn't a book written by a millionaire teaching you how to get rich. This is a book written by someone who lost a billion dollars teaching you how not to lose yours.

It's December 2025. I'm sixty-five years old. My current portfolio doesn’t look impressive to most people. But, I’m applying everything found in this book.

By conventional standards, I'm not qualified to write a book about wealth.

But here's what I am qualified to write about: **Regret.**

In May 2011, I sat in a truck stop outside Tulsa, Oklahoma, with $15,000 ready to invest and a laptop open to a Bitcoin exchange. The price was hovering around $1.50 per coin. I spent two hours researching. Reading forums. Running the numbers.

Then I watched a CNN segment that called it a scam used by criminals.

And I closed the laptop.

Two weeks later, I bought a breeding pair of Gypsy Vanner horses instead.

That decision cost me approximately one billion dollars.

If I'd bought Bitcoin that day and held it—even with imperfect execution, even with panic selling during crashes—I'd be worth somewhere between $100 million and $1 billion today.

Instead, I lost $23,500 on the horses and spent the next decade working twice as hard for half the money.

This book exists because of a conversation I had in October 2024 with a man named Sam Thornton.

Sam is a custodian at a public high school. He makes $48,000 a year. He lives in a mobile home he bought for $3,000 twenty years ago. He drives a 2005 Toyota Tacoma with over 300,000 miles on it.

And he's worth $8 million.

Not because he's smarter than me. Not because he makes more money than me. Not because he got lucky.

Because in May 2011, Sam made a different choice than I did.

He bought $500 worth of Bitcoin. And then he just... held it. Through crashes. Through volatility. Through every talking head on television telling him he was an idiot.

While I was shoveling horse manure and spiraling into debt, Sam was quietly becoming a multimillionaire.

When I met him, I expected to feel jealous. Bitter. Angry at the universe for the injustice of it all.

Instead, I felt something else: **Hope.**

Because Sam's story isn't about Bitcoin. It's about discipline. Patience. Living below your means. Making boring, consistent decisions that compound over decades.

And those things? Those are available to everyone.

Including you.

Including me.

This book is the story of two men who started in almost the same place and ended up in completely different destinations. One worth $8 million. One worth $28,000.

The gap between us isn't intelligence or luck or even the Bitcoin itself.

The gap is the framework.

Sam had one. I didn't.

Sam followed it for twenty years. I chased shortcuts.

Sam prepared for opportunity. I reacted to desperation.

And that made all the difference.

If you're reading this, I'm guessing you're somewhere between where Sam started and where I ended up. Maybe you've made mistakes. Maybe you're in debt. Maybe you feel like it's too late.

It's not.

I can't give you back the opportunities you've missed. I can't make Bitcoin cost $1.50 again. I can't undo your bad decisions any more than I can undo mine.

But I can show you the framework that works. The one Sam followed. The one I'm following now.

And I can show you what happens when you don't follow it—because I'm living proof.

This book is equal parts warning and roadmap.

The warning: Don't be like 2011 me.

The roadmap: Be like 2004-2024 Sam.

I lost a billion dollars so you don't have to.

Sam built $8 million so you can see how.

The next Bitcoin is coming. I don't know what it is. Neither does Sam. Neither does anyone else.

But I know this: When it shows up, you'll either be ready or you won't.

Sam was ready.

I wasn't.

Let's make sure you are.

Rich Abbott
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CHAPTER 1

The Truck Stop That Cost Me a Billion

I was halfway through a burnt truck stop burger when I heard the words that would haunt me for the rest of my life.

"Bitcoin."

It was May 2011. I'd just fueled up my Peterbilt at a Flying J outside Tulsa, Oklahoma. Seventeen hours into a twenty-two-hour haul from Phoenix to Chicago, and my brain felt like scrambled eggs. The kind of tired where you can still drive straight but couldn't tell someone what day it is.

The TV above the counter was tuned to CNN. I wasn't really watching—just staring at the screen while mechanically chewing lukewarm beef and wilted lettuce. Then a segment came on that made me put down the burger.

"A new digital currency called Bitcoin is gaining traction among tech enthusiasts and, alarmingly, on the dark web."

The anchor had that concerned look they always use when discussing things they don't understand but want you to fear. Behind her, graphics showed shadowy figures, computer code, and the word "UNREGULATED" in bold red letters.

"Law enforcement officials warn that this so-called cryptocurrency is being used to purchase illegal drugs, weapons, and worse on underground websites like Silk Road. The FBI is investigating."

I leaned forward.

"Financial experts say Bitcoin has no intrinsic value and warn investors to stay away from what many are calling an elaborate Ponzi scheme."

But here's what caught my attention: Between the fear-mongering, they mentioned the price.

Three dollars and seventeen cents.

Three dollars.

For what they were calling "digital gold." A currency that existed only on computers but could be sent anywhere in the world without banks, without governments, without permission.

I pulled out my phone—this was back when smartphones were still relatively new to guys like me—and started searching. Within ten minutes, I was reading forum posts from people who'd bought Bitcoin at fifty cents six months earlier and watched it climb to three dollars. A 500% return.

My hands were shaking. Not from the coffee.

See, I'd been looking to invest in something. *Anything.*

Owner-operator trucking had been good to me once. Back in 2005, 2006, I was clearing six figures easy. But the 2008 crash killed freight rates. By 2011, I was working twice as hard for half the money. Diesel prices were eating me alive. Insurance kept climbing. Maintenance on a ten-year-old rig never stopped.

I was forty-three years old, owned forty acres of countryside property outright, and had about $18,000 in the bank that I was desperate to turn into something more. Something that would let me stop living in this truck. Something that would let me come home.

I'd been researching hobby farms. Alpacas. Goats. Gypsy Vanner horses—beautiful animals that bred for good money if you found the right buyers. I'd even found a breeding pair for $14,000. The dream was simple: quit the road, raise animals, build a sustainable income on my own land.

But this Bitcoin thing...

I sat in that truck stop booth for another two hours. Ordered a third coffee. Read everything I could find. And the more I read, the more it made sense.

The internet had changed everything. Email replaced letters. Websites replaced encyclopedias. Downloads replaced CDs. Why wouldn't money go digital too?

I found a forum where a guy named Hal was explaining the technology. Something about a "blockchain" that made it impossible to counterfeit. Limited supply—only 21 million would ever exist. No central bank could print more. No government could inflate it away.

I did the math in my head. If even 1% of people started using this instead of regular money...

Three dollars could become three hundred. Three thousand. Thirty thousand.

My $15,000 could become $150,000. Maybe more.

I could quit trucking. Today. This month. Buy the Bitcoin, watch it grow, and never spend another night in a sleeper cab.

My finger hovered over the "Create Account" button on something called Mt. Gox, the main Bitcoin exchange at the time.

Then I looked back up at the TV.

CNN was running another segment. This time, a financial advisor in an expensive suit was shaking his head with that smug certainty that only people who've never been broke can manage.

"Bitcoin is not a real investment. It's not backed by anything. No government supports it. It's being used by criminals and will likely be shut down. Anyone putting real money into this will lose everything."

The scroll at the bottom of the screen read: "EXPERTS WARN: BITCOIN LIKELY A SCAM."

I closed the laptop.

They're right, I thought. *This is crazy. Digital money? That exists nowhere? That I can't hold in my hand?*

I thought about my forty acres. Real land. Real dirt. Real fences I'd built with my own hands.

I thought about those Gypsy Vanner horses. Real animals. Real breeding. Real babies that would sell for real money to real people.

I thought about Bitcoin. Ones and zeros. On computers. That could vanish with one government raid or one hacker or one technical glitch.

Horses are real, I told myself. *Bitcoin is a fantasy.*

I paid my check. Got back in the truck. Finished the haul to Chicago.

And two weeks later, I bought the breeding pair of horses for $14,000.

Here's what that decision cost me.

The $15,000 I was going to invest in Bitcoin at $1.50 per coin would have bought me 10,000 Bitcoin.

Let me write that out so you can really see it: **Ten thousand Bitcoin.**

In December 2017, Bitcoin hit $20,000 per coin.

10,000 × $20,000 = **$200,000,000.**

Two hundred million dollars.

But I would've sold by then, right? Taken profits? Been smart about it?

Sure. Let's say I panic-sold half at $10,000 in 2016. That's $50 million. Surely I would've sold the rest at $20,000. Another $100 million.

$150 million total. After taxes, maybe $100 million clear.

But let's say I was really disciplined. Let's say I held some. Just 1,000 Bitcoin. Through the crash in 2018. Through the recovery. Through the pandemic.

In November 2021, Bitcoin hit $69,000 per coin.

1,000 × $69,000 = **$69,000,000.**

Today, as I write this in late 2024, Bitcoin is trading around $95,000.

Even if I'd sold most of it along the way and only kept 1,000 coins to today:

1,000 × $95,000 = **$95,000,000.**

Ninety-five million dollars.

But the TikTok video I saw a few weeks ago—the one that made me sick to my stomach all over again—ran the numbers on what would've happened if I'd just *held everything.*

10,000 Bitcoin at today's prices: **$950,000,000.**

Just under **one billion dollars.**

From $15,000.

Want to know what I got instead?

I bought the mare for $5,500 and the stallion for $8,500. Paid transportation from two different farms. Spent $13,000 on a well when mine ran dry the first summer. Poured another $10,000 into hay, feed, vet bills, and fencing over the next few years.

All in, I invested about $37,000.

I sold the pregnant mare for $3,500. The stallion for $3,000. Two of the foals for $2,500 each. One for $2,000.

Total recovered: $13,500.

Net loss: $23,500.

But here's the part that really kills me.

One of those foals I sold for $2,500? I found out years later that the buyer trained it up and sold it for $31,000. Someone else made $28,500 profit on my horse.

Meanwhile, that same year, Bitcoin went from $3 to $1,000.

The $15,000 I didn't invest became $5,000,000 for whoever *did* buy at $3.

I'm not writing this book to make you feel sorry for me.

I'm writing it because last week, I met a man who made the opposite choice I did.

His name is Sam Thornton. He's fifty years old. He works as a custodian at a public high school in a small Midwestern town of about 8,000 people. He makes $48,000 a year.

And he's worth $8 million.

He could've retired ten years ago. Could've moved to Florida, bought a beach house, lived on investment income. But when I asked him why he still shows up every morning at 6 AM to unlock classrooms and fix broken ceiling tiles, he said something I'll never forget:

"This is my community. These are my kids. You know how hard it is to find a good custodian in a small town? Someone who actually cares if the boiler's running right? Someone who knows which classroom door sticks and which bathroom faucet drips? I've been here twenty-three years. I know every teacher, every coach, every lunch lady.

When I retire, they'll have to hire someone from the city who doesn't give a damn. I'm not ready to do that to them yet."

Sam doesn't like cities. Never has. Born and raised in a town where people still wave at strangers. Where the high school football game is the biggest event on Friday nights. Where the same families have lived for generations.

He could live anywhere. He *chooses* to stay.

Not because he's stuck. Because he's *rooted.*

Sam's worth eight million dollars not because he chased money, but because he didn't need to prove anything to anyone. He was content with his life, his work, his community. And that contentment gave him the clarity to make one smart decision in 2011 that changed everything.

He bought $500 worth of Bitcoin.

And while I was shoveling horse manure and watching my savings evaporate, Sam was quietly becoming a millionaire—still showing up every day to serve the kids in his school.

This is his story.

And mine.

And if you're reading this, it's probably about to become yours.

Because the next Bitcoin is already here. The next life-changing opportunity is already visible. The next decision that will haunt you—or make you—is probably sitting in front of you right now.

The question is: Are you going to listen to CNN?

Or are you going to listen to the quiet voice in your head that says, "What if?"

I listened to the experts.

Sam listened to himself.

I'm broke and bitter, still trying to rebuild.

Sam just bought new floor polishers for the school gymnasium with his own money because the district budget didn't have room for them this year.

Let me tell you how a janitor with a $3,000 mobile home became wealthier than most doctors, lawyers, and MBA graduates you know—and why he still spends his Saturdays fixing the playground equipment at the park where he learned to ride a bike.

And more importantly, let me tell you how to make sure you never, ever make the mistake I made.

Because I can't get my billion dollars back.

But I can make damn sure you don't lose yours.

CHAPTER 2
The Psychology of a Billion-Dollar Mistake

I need you to understand something before we go any further.

I'm not stupid.

I didn't fail to invest in Bitcoin because I couldn't read. I didn't miss the opportunity because I was lazy or ignorant or didn't care about my financial future. In fact, it was the opposite.

I researched Bitcoin for weeks. I read whitepapers I barely understood. I joined forums. I asked questions. I ran the numbers over and over in my head during those long highway stretches between Phoenix and Chicago, between Dallas and Detroit.

I *knew* it could work.

And that's what makes this so painful.

I didn't fail because I didn't know better. I failed because I *thought* I knew better.

Let me explain what really happened in my brain that day at the truck stop. Because if you understand this—really understand it—you'll never make the same mistake.

The human brain has two systems for making decisions. Neuroscientists call them System 1 and System 2, but I'm going to call them what they really are: the **Fear Brain** and the **Thinking Brain**.

Your Fear Brain is fast. It's automatic. It evolved to keep you alive when a rustling in the bushes might be a tiger. It sees danger everywhere. It trusts authority. It follows the herd. It asks one question: *"Will this kill me?"*

Your Thinking Brain is slow. It's deliberate. It analyzes. It calculates probabilities. It weighs evidence. It asks: *"What's actually true here?"*

The problem? Your Fear Brain is *much* louder.

And on May 17, 2011, sitting in that truck stop booth with my laptop open and my finger hovering over the "Buy Bitcoin" button, my Fear Brain was screaming.

Here's what it was saying:

"The TV says it's a scam."

"Law enforcement is investigating."

"Financial experts—people with degrees, people in suits—say it's worthless."

"You're a truck driver. What do you know about cryptocurrency? About blockchain? About digital currencies?"

"If you lose this $15,000, you're done. No more chances. No more dreams. Back on the road forever."

"Horses are REAL. You can SEE horses. You can TOUCH horses. You can't touch Bitcoin. What if it just... disappears?"

And the loudest voice of all:

"Everyone will think you're an idiot."

That last one is the killer. Because it wasn't really about the money, was it?

It was about what people would say if I lost it.

My ex-wife. My buddies. The guys at the truck stops who already thought I was crazy for buying forty acres in the middle of nowhere. What would they say if I told them I'd dumped $15,000 into "internet money" that the FBI was investigating?

They'd laugh at me.

And I couldn't handle that.

So I chose the "safe" option. The option that made sense to everyone around me. The option that no one could criticize.

I bought horses.

Here's the sick irony: Buying horses actually *was* the riskier investment.

Let me show you the math I should've done but didn't.

Bitcoin Risk Assessment (What I Should Have Calculated):

Worst case scenario: Bitcoin goes to zero. I lose $15,000.

Best case scenario: Bitcoin becomes widely adopted. I make... who knows? 10x? 100x? The upside was literally unlimited.

Risk: $15,000 Potential reward: $150,000 to $1,500,000+ (even conservative estimates)

Risk-to-reward ratio: Asymmetric in my favor.

Horse Risk Assessment (What I Actually Did):

Worst case scenario: Horses get sick, market crashes, I can't sell them. I lose $37,000+ in total investment plus years of my time and labor.

Best case scenario: I successfully breed and sell horses in a niche market during an economic recovery. I might make... $50,000? $75,000? Maybe $100,000 if everything goes perfectly and I'm lucky.

Risk: $37,000+ plus opportunity cost of my time Potential reward: $50,000-$100,000 (absolute best case)

Risk-to-reward ratio: Almost even. Maybe slightly in my favor if I'm an expert. Which I wasn't.

Do you see it?

The "risky" investment (Bitcoin) had limited downside ($15,000) and unlimited upside.

The "safe" investment (horses) had much higher downside ($37,000+) and capped upside.

But my Fear Brain didn't calculate any of that.

It just heard "CNN" and "FBI" and "scam" and screamed, *"DANGER! DANGER! DO THE NORMAL THING!"*

This is called **authority bias**, and it's one of the most expensive cognitive errors you can make.

Authority bias is when you trust someone's opinion not because of the evidence they present, but because of their *position*. The suit they're wearing. The letters after their name. The network they're on.

That financial advisor on CNN? I never checked his track record. Never asked if he'd actually researched Bitcoin or just read the same headlines I did. Never wondered if maybe—just maybe—he had an incentive to keep people investing in traditional markets where he made his commissions.

I just assumed: *He's on TV. He's wearing a suit. He must know more than me.*

And that assumption cost me a billion dollars.

But there's another brain malfunction that got me: **loss aversion**.

Studies show that humans feel the pain of losing money about 2.5 times more intensely than the pleasure of gaining the same amount.

Losing $15,000 felt catastrophic to my brain.

Gaining $150,000 felt nice, but abstract.

So when I imagined the Bitcoin scenario, my brain showed me vivid images of checking my account and seeing zero. Of having to tell people I'd lost everything. Of the shame. The regret. The stupidity.

When I imagined the horse scenario, my brain showed me gentle images of beautiful animals grazing on my land. Of foals being born.

Of steady, predictable income. Of being able to tell people, "I run a horse breeding operation," and watching them nod with respect instead of confusion.

One scenario felt like *loss*.

One scenario felt like *safety*.

So I chose safety.

And lost everything anyway.

Here's what I didn't understand then but understand now:

The biggest risk isn't losing money.

The biggest risk is dying full of regret.

I'll be seventy years old someday—God willing—and I'll still remember that truck stop. That screen. That moment when I could've clicked "Buy" and didn't.

I'll remember it more clearly than my wedding day. More clearly than the birth of my children. More clearly than anything else in my life.

Because opportunities like that don't come twice.

You know what Sam Thornton told me when I asked him if he ever worried about Bitcoin going to zero?

He said: "Sure. Every day at first. But I figured, worst case, I'm out $500. I spend more than that on chain restaurant meals I don't even remember eating. Best case? I change my life. So I bought it, wrote down the password, and tried to forget about it."

Tried to forget about it.

While I was obsessively checking horse breeding forums and vet bills and hay prices, Sam was just... living his life. Mopping floors. Fixing lockers. Investing his rent savings into index funds every month like clockwork.

He wasn't smarter than me.

He just wasn't *afraid* of the right things.

I was afraid of looking stupid.

He was afraid of dying with regrets.

I was afraid of what people would say.

He was afraid of not trying.

I was afraid of losing $15,000.

He was afraid of losing the *opportunity*.

Now let me show you the neuroscience of what actually happened in our brains.

When I saw that CNN segment, my amygdala—the almond-shaped part of the brain responsible for fear responses—lit up like a Christmas tree. It flooded my system with cortisol and adrenaline. My prefrontal cortex, the part that does rational analysis, basically shut down.

I was in fight-or-flight mode.

And in fight-or-flight mode, humans don't make good decisions. We make *safe* decisions. We run from the tiger. We trust the chief. We follow the herd.

Sam's brain did something different.

When he read about Bitcoin, his anterior cingulate cortex—the part of the brain that detects conflict between different information sources—activated. He noticed the gap between what the media was saying and what the technology actually did.

That created curiosity instead of fear.

Curiosity activates the prefrontal cortex. And when your prefrontal cortex is online, you can actually think.

So while my brain was screaming, "RUN FROM THE TIGER," Sam's brain was asking, "Wait, is that actually a tiger? Or is it just a big house cat?"

He looked closer.

I ran away.

Here's the part that really gets me:

This wasn't a one-time mistake.

This same pattern—authority bias plus loss aversion plus fear-based decision making—has cost me opportunities over and over and over again.

In 2008, when the stock market crashed and everything was on sale, I sold my small portfolio at a loss because the news said, "It's going to get worse." It didn't. I missed the entire recovery.

In 2015, when a buddy told me about Airbnb and suggested I rent out my property, I said no because "the government might regulate it." They didn't. My property sits empty half the year.

In 2017, when I heard about Ethereum at $100, I thought, "I already missed Bitcoin, I'm not falling for this again." Ethereum hit $4,000.

Same brain. Same fear. Same loss.

And every single time, there was someone like Sam making the opposite choice.

Not because they were lucky.

Because they understood something I'm only now learning:

The crowd is almost always wrong about the future.

Think about it.

In 1903, the President of the Michigan Savings Bank told Henry Ford's lawyer: "The horse is here to stay, but the automobile is only a novelty—a fad."

In 1977, Ken Olsen, founder of Digital Equipment Corporation, said: "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

In 1995, Newsweek published an article titled "The Internet? Bah!" It claimed online shopping would never replace going to the store.

In 2004, Bill Gates said: "Spam will be a thing of the past in two years."

In 2007, Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft, laughed at the iPhone and said: "There's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share."

These weren't random people. These were experts. Leaders. People in positions of authority.

And they were catastrophically wrong.

You know who was right?

The weirdos. The outsiders. The people willing to look stupid for believing in something the crowd dismissed.

The Henry Fords.

The Steve Jobs.

The early internet adopters.

And in 2011, the people who bought Bitcoin at three dollars while CNN called it a scam.

Sam wasn't smarter than Bill Gates or Steve Ballmer or financial advisors on CNN.

But he understood one simple truth:

Progress always looks crazy at first.

He'd seen it happen before. He watched his school go from chalkboards to overhead projectors to computers to iPads. Each time, people said the new thing was unnecessary. A waste of money. Would never replace the old way.

Each time, the skeptics were wrong.

So when he heard about digital currency, he didn't ask, "Is this what people are doing now?"

He asked, "Is this what people will be doing in twenty years?"

And he made a small bet that the answer was yes.

I asked Sam if he ever doubted himself. If he ever almost sold when Bitcoin crashed in 2014 and the media declared it dead.

He said yes. Absolutely. He was terrified.

But then he told me something that changed how I think about investing:

"I didn't invest $500 in Bitcoin. I invested $500 in being wrong. I wanted to pay $500 to find out if I was right or wrong about the future. Either way, I'd learn something. Either way, I wouldn't spend the rest of my life wondering 'what if.' That $500 bought me peace of mind."

Do you see the difference?

I tried to avoid being wrong.

Sam tried to avoid living with regret.

I protected my ego.

He protected his future self.

Here's what I want you to take from this chapter:

Your brain is not designed to make you rich.

Your brain is designed to keep you alive in a world that hasn't existed for 10,000 years.

It's designed to fear the tiger, trust the chief, and follow the herd.

In that ancient world, those instincts kept you breathing.

In the modern world of investing, those same instincts keep you broke.

Because the crowd is almost always wrong about the future. Authority figures are almost always defending the past. And your fear of looking stupid will cost you more than any actual financial loss ever could.

I know this now.

I learned it the hard way.

But Sam knew it in 2011.

And that's why he's worth $8 million.

While I'm writing this book, trying to help you avoid my mistakes.

In the next chapter, I'm going to tell you about the horses. About the well that cost $13,000 I didn't budget for. About the foal I sold for $2,500 that someone else sold for $31,000.

About every painful, expensive lesson I learned while Sam was getting quietly rich.

But before we get there, I need you to answer one question:

What is your Fear Brain telling you right now that you can't do? What opportunity are you avoiding because the "experts" say it won't work? What dream are you dismissing because you're afraid of looking stupid?

Write it down.

Because that thing—that scary, uncertain, "crazy" thing—might be your Bitcoin.

And twenty years from now, you'll either be like me, writing about the fortune you lost.

Or you'll be like Sam, quietly changing lives because you had the courage to ignore the crowd.

The choice is yours.

But choose fast.

Because I promise you: The next Bitcoin is already here.

And the clock is ticking.

CHAPTER 3
The Well That Swallowed My Dreams

April 2011. I quit trucking.

Just like that. Twenty years on the road, and I walked away. Parked the Peterbilt, handed the keys back to the leasing company, and told them I was done.

My buddies thought I'd lost my mind.

"In *this* economy?" one of them said. "You're giving up steady work to do *what* exactly? Play farmer?"

I didn't care. I'd made my decision. I was going to build something real. Something I could see and touch. Something that didn't require me to piss in a bottle on the side of I-40 because I couldn't afford to lose time stopping at a rest area.

I was going to breed Gypsy Vanner horses.

If you don't know what those are, picture the most beautiful horse you've ever seen. Long, flowing mane. Feathered feet that look like they're wearing fancy boots. Gentle temperament. They're stunning animals, originally bred by Irish Travelers to pull their caravans.

And in 2011, they were selling for serious money.

I'd done my research. A quality foal could sell for $8,000 to $15,000. A trained adult could go for $20,000 to $40,000. The market was strong. Demand was high. Rich people loved them for their kids. They were perfect for small farms, therapeutic riding programs, and anyone who wanted a horse that looked like it walked out of a fairy tale.

All I needed was a breeding pair and some land.

I had the land. Forty acres of rolling hills in Missouri, paid off. No mortgage. Just me, the wind, and more space than I knew what to do with.

And I had $18,000 in savings. Enough to buy the horses and get started.

This was going to work.

I found the breeding pair in Kentucky. A three-year-old mare named Maggie and a five-year-old stallion named Duke. Both registered. Both with good bloodlines. The seller wanted $14,000 for the pair.

I drove out to see them in person. Spent two hours walking around them, checking their confirmation, their temperament, their health records. They were exactly what I wanted.

I wrote the check that day.

Transportation was another story. The mare was in eastern Kentucky. The stallion was in western Tennessee. Two different farms, two different haulers. Another $1,200 I hadn't budgeted for.

But that was fine. This was an investment. You have to spend money to make money, right?

The horses arrived in early May. I'd spent the previous month building a run-in shelter, reinforcing fence lines, and stocking up on hay. I was ready.

Maggie and Duke settled in beautifully. Within a week, they were comfortable. Within a month, Maggie was pregnant.

Everything was going exactly as planned.

Then summer hit.

Missouri in July is brutal. Humid, sticky heat that makes you sweat through your shirt just walking to the mailbox. And my well—the one that had been fine for the five years I'd owned the property—decided it had enough.

I turned on the hose one morning to fill the water trough, and nothing came out.

Not a trickle. Not a drip. Nothing.

I called a well company. Guy came out, ran some tests, and gave me the news.

"Well's run dry. Water table dropped. You need to drill deeper or drill a new one."

"How much?"

"Thirteen thousand. Give or take."

I actually laughed. Not because it was funny. Because it was so absurd I didn't know what else to do.

Thirteen thousand dollars.

I had about $2,500 left in the bank after buying the horses and paying for transportation and feed and fencing supplies.

"Can we do a payment plan?" I asked.

"We can. But we need half down to start the work. $6,500."

I didn't have it.

So I did what broke people do: I put it on credit. A credit card with 18% interest that I swore I'd pay off as soon as I sold the first foal.

The well company drilled for three days. Hit water at 340 feet. Installed a new pump. Handed me a bill for $13,400 after permits and fees I hadn't anticipated.

I signed the paperwork and tried not to think about the fact that I was now $11,000 in debt before I'd even sold a single horse.

Meanwhile, Bitcoin went from $3 to $8.

I didn't notice. I was too busy shoveling manure and calculating hay costs.

Hay in Missouri runs about $5 to $7 a bale, depending on the season. A horse eats roughly one bale every two to three days. I had two horses. That's 200-300 bales a year, minimum.

$1,500 to $2,000 a year. Just for hay.

Then there was feed. Grain supplements. Hoof trimming every six to eight weeks. Vet visits. Deworming. Vaccinations.

Every month, I was bleeding money.

But that was okay, I told myself. Because Maggie was pregnant. And in eleven months, I'd have a foal. And that foal would sell for $8,000 to $12,000. And I'd be back in the black.

I just had to make it eleven months.

Maggie gave birth in April 2012. A little filly with a perfect blaze down her face and the most beautiful feathering I'd ever seen. I named her Willow.

She was perfect.

And she was worth exactly nothing for at least two years.

See, you can't sell a foal fresh off the mother. You have to wean them. Train them. Get them used to a halter, to being handled, to basic ground manners. A foal with zero training is a liability, not an asset.

So I had to wait.

Two more years of hay. Two more years of feed. Two more years of vet bills.

And in the meantime, I needed income.

I started picking up work where I could find it. Day labor. Handyman jobs. Anything that paid cash. I wasn't making enough to cover my expenses, so the credit card balance kept climbing.

$15,000. Then $18,000. Then $22,000.

The interest alone was eating me alive.

By 2013, Bitcoin hit $1,000.

I saw the headlines. Couldn't avoid them. "Bitcoin Millionaires." "The Cryptocurrency Boom." "Early Investors Strike It Rich."

If I'd bought $15,000 worth at $3, I'd have had 5,000 Bitcoin.

5,000 × $1,000 = $5,000,000.

Five million dollars.

Instead, I had a two-year-old horse I couldn't sell yet, a credit card bill I couldn't pay, and a well that had cost me more than some people's cars.

I didn't tell anyone. What was I going to say? "Hey, remember when I quit my job to raise horses? Yeah, that's going great. I'm $22,000 in debt and living on ramen."

I just kept my head down and kept working.

Finally, in late 2014, Willow was ready to sell. She was two and a half years old, halter-trained, gentle, beautiful. I listed her for $10,000.

No offers.

I dropped the price to $8,500.

Still nothing.

See, something had happened between 2011 and 2014 that I hadn't accounted for: The economy still sucked. Luxury horse sales had tanked. People weren't buying $10,000 horses for their kids anymore. They were worried about keeping their jobs and paying their mortgages.

The market I'd researched in 2011 didn't exist in 2014.

I dropped the price again. $6,500.

Got one inquiry. Lady came out to look at her. Said she was beautiful but that $6,500 was too much. She could offer $4,000.

I almost took it. Almost said yes just to stop the bleeding.

But I had one shred of pride left. I told her no.

Two weeks later, a guy from Iowa called. Said he'd give me $5,000 cash if I could deliver her to him.

I said yes.

Spent $300 on a horse trailer rental and fuel to drive her to Iowa. Handed her over. Took the cash.

Netted $4,700.

After three and a half years of feeding her, caring for her, training her, and paying a vet bill when she got a hoof abscess, I made $4,700.

That didn't even cover one year of hay.

But I still had Maggie and Duke. And Maggie was pregnant again.

So I kept going.

Over the next two years, I sold two more foals. One for $2,500. One for $2,000.

And in 2016, I finally admitted defeat.

I sold Maggie for $3,500—pregnant, which at least added some value. I sold Duke for $3,000.

Total recovered from five years of horse breeding:

Willow: $4,700
Foal #2: $2,500
Foal #3: $2,000
Maggie: $3,500
Duke: $3,000

Total: $15,700

Total invested:

Horses: $14,000
Transportation: $1,200
Well: $13,400
Hay (5 years): $10,000
Vet bills, feed, misc: $5,000

Total: $43,600

Net loss: $27,900

That doesn't include the interest on the credit card, which added another $6,000 over the years.

Real loss: $33,900

But here's the part that still makes me sick to my stomach.

In 2018, I got a message on Facebook from the guy in Iowa who'd bought Willow.

He'd trained her up. Showed her in a few competitions. And just sold her.

For $31,000.

He thanked me for selling her to him at such a good price. Said she'd been a great investment.

I stared at that message for a long time.

He'd made $26,000 profit on my horse.

I'd lost $33,900 on my entire operation.

And if I'd just held her for three more years, maybe gotten her some professional training, maybe waited for the market to recover...

But I didn't.

Because I was broke. And desperate. And drowning.

Same reason I sold Bitcoin would've gotten sold if I'd bought it: I couldn't afford to hold.

And that's when it hit me.

The problem wasn't the horses.

The problem was me.

I didn't have the financial cushion to wait out the bad markets. I didn't have the patience to let things mature. I didn't have the discipline to hold when things got hard.

I panicked. I sold. I took losses.

Just like I would've done with Bitcoin if I'd bought it at $3 and watched it crash to $200 in 2014.

I would've sold at the bottom and missed the recovery.

Because I didn't understand the one thing Sam Thornton understood perfectly:

You can't win if you can't hold.

Meanwhile, what was Sam doing during those same years?

He was mopping floors at the high school.

Living in his $3,000 mobile home.

Paying $380 a year in property taxes instead of bleeding $2,000 a year on hay.

Investing $650 a month into index funds like clockwork.

And in 2013, when Bitcoin hit $1,000, Sam sold half of his 333 Bitcoin for $166,000.

He didn't need the money. His mobile home was paid off. His expenses were low. His job was steady.

But he sold anyway. Because he'd read about taking profits. About de-risking. About making sure that even if Bitcoin went to zero, he'd still win.

He paid the taxes. Put $80,000 in guaranteed investment certificates—the most boring, safe investment imaginable. Invested $25,000 more into index funds.

And kept the other 167 Bitcoin.

Just in case.

When I heard this, I wanted to scream.

Not at Sam. At myself.

Because Sam's life wasn't easier than mine. He didn't make more money than I did. He didn't have some secret advantage.

He just made one different choice in 2011.

One $500 choice.

And that choice gave him the financial breathing room to make every other decision from a place of strength instead of desperation.

While I was selling horses at a loss because I needed to pay my credit card bill, Sam was selling Bitcoin at a profit because he *chose* to, not because he *had* to.

That's the difference between wealth and poverty.

It's not how much you make.

It's whether you're making decisions from abundance or scarcity.

I sold the last horse in 2016 and swore I'd never invest in anything again.

I was done. Beaten. Broke.

I went back to trucking. Different company. Worse pay. But at least it was steady.

And I tried not to think about Bitcoin.

Tried not to check the price.

Tried not to calculate what could've been.

But in December 2017, I couldn't help it. Bitcoin was all over the news again.

$20,000 per coin.

My $15,000 would've been worth $100 million.

I pulled over at a rest stop, walked into the bathroom, and cried.

Not because I'd lost money.

Because I'd lost *time*.

Five years of my life wasted on horses that cost me everything. Five years I could've spent building wealth, building freedom, building a life.

Instead, I'd built debt.

And the guy who'd bought Willow? He'd built $26,000 profit.

And Sam?

Sam had just sold another batch of Bitcoin at $20,000 and quietly became a multimillionaire.

Here's what I learned from the horses:

Lesson 1: The "safe" choice is often the riskiest choice.

Horses felt safe because I could see them. Touch them. Control them.

Bitcoin felt risky because it was invisible. Volatile. Unpredictable.

But horses required massive ongoing capital, perfect timing, and market conditions I couldn't control.

Bitcoin required $500 and the discipline not to panic-sell.

Which one was actually riskier?

Lesson 2: You can't build wealth if you're operating from scarcity.

Every decision I made was from desperation. Sell the foal because I need cash *now*. Drop the price because I can't afford to wait. Take on debt because I don't have savings.

Sam operated from abundance. He had an emergency fund. He had low expenses. He had time.

So he could wait. He could hold. He could make decisions based on strategy instead of survival.

Lesson 3: The market doesn't care about your effort.

I worked my ass off for those horses. Shoveling manure in the Missouri heat. Building fences. Midnight trips to the vet. Years of sweat and stress.

The market didn't care.

It paid me $2,000 for a horse I'd raised for three years.

Meanwhile, Sam clicked "buy" on a website, saved his password, and made millions.

Effort doesn't equal results.

Smart decisions equal results.

Lesson 4: If you can't afford to hold, you can't afford to invest.

This is the big one.

If I'd bought Bitcoin and been forced to sell it in 2014 when I needed to pay my credit card bill, I would've sold at $400 and missed the run to $20,000.

Same result as the horses.

The only reason Sam won is because he didn't *need* to sell. His lifestyle was so lean, his expenses so low, that he could hold through crashes and volatility and fear.

You don't get rich from buying.

You get rich from holding.

And you can only hold if you're not desperate.

In the next chapter, I'm going to introduce you to Sam properly. You're going to meet the man who made the opposite choices I did. Who bought the mobile home instead of the McMansion. Who invested $500 instead of $15,000 (because that's all he could afford to lose). Who built wealth slowly, boringly, and correctly.

And you're going to see exactly how a guy making $32,000 a year in 2004 became worth $8 million by 2024.

Not through luck.

Not through genius.

But through a series of small, smart decisions that compounded over time.

While I was trying to get rich quick with horses, Sam was getting rich slow with discipline.

While I was drowning in debt, Sam was drowning in dividend checks.

While I was crying in a rest stop bathroom, Sam was buying new floor polishers for his school.

His story is what this book is really about.

Mine is just the cautionary tale.

But you needed to hear both.

Because the next time you're faced with a choice between the "safe" investment and the uncomfortable one, between following the crowd and trusting yourself, between operating from fear and operating from faith...

You'll remember the horses.

And you'll choose differently.

I promise.

CHAPTER 4
The $3,000 Kingdom

Sam Thornton was thirty years old when his parents sat him down at the kitchen table and told him they were selling the house.

It was 2004. Sam had been living with them since graduating high school twelve years earlier. Not because he couldn't afford to leave—he had a steady job as a custodian at Lincoln High School making $32,000 a year. Not because he was lazy or directionless.

He stayed because it made sense.

Sam paid his parents $400 a month for room and board. They were happy to have him. He was quiet, helpful, kept his room clean, fixed things around the house without being asked. He'd replaced the garbage disposal, rebuilt the back deck, and rewired the basement. His dad's arthritis was getting worse, so having Sam around to handle the heavy lifting was a blessing.

It was a good arrangement for everyone.

Until his parents decided they wanted to downsize.

"We're getting older," his mom said. "This house is too much. Too many stairs. Too much yard. We found a nice little ranch house closer to your sister. One level. Small yard. We can actually manage it."

Sam understood. Of course he did.

"When?" he asked.

"We're putting it on the market next month. Should sell by summer."

Six months.

Sam had six months to figure out where he was going to live.

Here's what most thirty-year-olds would've done in 2004:

Gone to a bank. Gotten pre-approved for a mortgage. Looked at houses in the $120,000 to $150,000 range. Put down 5% or maybe 10% if they'd been saving. Signed up for a thirty-year mortgage at 6% interest.

Total cost over thirty years? About $280,000 for a $130,000 house.

Sam did the math and almost threw up.

He'd read a book a few years earlier—something his mom had given him called "The Total Money Makeover" by Dave Ramsey. Most of it had seemed extreme. But one phrase stuck with him:

"Mortgage" comes from the French words "mort" (death) and "gage" (pledge).

Death pledge.

You're pledging to make payments until you die. Or at least until you're in your sixties.

Sam was thirty. The idea of being in debt until he was sixty made his skin crawl.

But what choice did he have? You can't just *not* have housing. Renting would cost $800 a month—$9,600 a year—and he'd own nothing. A mortgage would cost about $900 a month, but at least he'd own it eventually.

Both options felt like prison sentences.

So Sam started looking for a third option.

He found it in the classifieds section of the local paper.

This was before Craigslist had really taken off in small Midwestern towns. Before Facebook Marketplace. People still put ads in the actual newspaper.

"County Tax Sale—May 15th, 2004. Various properties. Mobile homes, vacant lots, commercial buildings. Unpaid property taxes. Minimum bid = back taxes owed."

Sam had never been to a tax sale. Didn't know how they worked. But he had a Saturday off, so he drove to the county courthouse to check it out.

The room was full of older guys in work boots and paint-stained jeans. Investors. Flippers. People who knew what they were doing.

Sam felt out of place. But he stayed.

The auctioneer went through the properties one by one. An abandoned commercial building downtown—back taxes of $18,000. Sold for $19,000. A vacant lot on the edge of town—back taxes of $1,200. Sold for $1,500.

Then they got to Lot 47.

"Mobile home on 0.4 acres, Cedar Street. Back taxes owed: $2,800. Do I hear $2,800?"

Sam had driven past Cedar Street before. Quiet neighborhood. Older homes, but well-maintained. Trees. Sidewalks. About two miles from the high school where he worked.

No one bid.

"$2,800, anyone?"

Silence.

Sam's hand went up before his brain caught up.

"$2,800 to the gentleman in the back. Going once... going twice... sold."

Sam walked out of that courthouse having just bought a mobile home for $2,800.

He had no idea what he'd just done.

The first time Sam saw the property, he almost cried.

The mobile home was a 1978 single-wide. Fourteen feet wide, sixty feet long. Faded yellow siding with rust stains under the windows. The front steps were rotted through. The yard was waist-high weeds. A satellite dish from the 1980s was still bolted to the roof.

It looked like a meth lab.

But the lot was beautiful. Almost half an acre. Mature oak trees. A gravel driveway. And it was in a good neighborhood—houses around it were worth $80,000 to $100,000. Someone had just let this one go to hell.

Sam sat in his truck for twenty minutes, staring at it, wondering if he'd made a massive mistake.

Then he got out and walked around.

The siding was bad, but the frame was solid. The windows were intact. The roof had some soft spots but wasn't collapsing. The door was locked, but he could see through the windows—inside was trashed. Carpet ripped up. Cabinets hanging open. Trash everywhere.

But the bones were good.

Sam pulled out a notebook and started making a list:

Exterior:

- New siding: $1,200
- Steps and small deck: $400
- Paint trim: $200

Interior:

- Drywall repair: $800
- Paint (all rooms): $600
- Laminate flooring: $700
- Used appliances (fridge, stove): $800

Plumbing/Electrical:

- Replace old fixtures: $500
- Update outlets: $300

Misc:

- Deep cleaning supplies: $200
- Landscaping (mower, tools, seed): $500

Total estimated cost: $6,000

Add the $2,800 purchase price, and he'd be all-in for $8,800.

For comparison, a security deposit and first month's rent on an apartment would cost him $1,600. And he'd own nothing.

Here, he'd own the property. The land. The home. For less than six months of rent.

Sam made his decision.

He took three weeks of vacation time in April. Told his boss he was doing "a home renovation project." Which was technically true.

Every morning, he showed up at 6 AM. Worked until dark. Came back the next day and did it again.

First week: Demo and repair.

He ripped out the disgusting carpet. Tore down water-damaged drywall. Replaced the rotted subfloor in the bathroom. Fixed a leaking pipe under the kitchen sink. Hauled twelve contractor bags of trash to the dump.

It was brutal, dirty work. But Sam had been a custodian for eight years. He knew how to clean. How to fix. How to make broken things whole again.

Second week: Rebuilding.

He patched the drywall. Taped and mudded the seams. Sanded everything smooth. Painted every room. Ceilings first, then walls. Two coats. White for the ceilings, soft beige for the walls.

He installed laminate flooring in the living room and bedrooms. Peel-and-stick vinyl tiles in the kitchen and bathroom.

He replaced the kitchen sink and faucet. Updated the light fixtures. Replaced every electrical outlet and cover plate in the house.

It started to look like a home.

Third week: Finishing touches.

He built new front steps out of pressure-treated lumber. Added a small deck—just six feet by eight feet, but enough to set a chair and have morning coffee.

He power-washed the exterior siding. It didn't look great, but it looked better. He'd save the new siding for next year when he had more money.

He mowed the lawn. Pulled weeds. Planted grass seed in the bare patches. Trimmed the overgrown bushes.

On the last day of his vacation, Sam drove to a Habitat for Humanity ReStore and bought a used refrigerator for $200 and a stove for $150. Both worked. Both were ugly. He didn't care.

He plugged them in, turned on the water, flipped the breaker.

Everything worked.

Total spent: $6,200 in materials, plus the $2,800 purchase price and $200 in title transfer fees.

All-in cost: $9,200.

Sam moved in on September 1st, 2004.

His parents helped him move his bedroom furniture, his books, his clothes. It took two trips in his dad's pickup truck.

That first night, Sam sat on his front deck with a beer and looked at his kingdom.

A fourteen-foot-wide mobile home on 0.4 acres that he'd bought for $3,000 and fixed up for $6,200.

Total investment: $9,200.

No mortgage. No landlord. No debt.

His annual property taxes: $380.

His monthly housing cost: $32 in property taxes, plus utilities.

Electric ran about $80 a month. Water was $30. Trash pickup was $15.

Total monthly cost: $157.

For comparison, his coworkers were paying $800 to $1,000 a month to rent apartments they'd never own.

Sam was paying $157 to own his home outright.

The difference: $650 to $850 a month.

That was money he could invest. Money he could save. Money that would compound for the next twenty years.

But he didn't think about that yet.

He just sat on his deck, drank his beer, and felt something he'd never felt before.

Freedom.

Here's what no one tells you about buying a mobile home:

People will judge you.

Sam's coworkers asked where he'd moved, and when he told them, they got quiet. One guy laughed. "A trailer? Dude, you're thirty years old. You can't live in a trailer."

His sister visited once, smiled politely, and never came back. She lived in a three-bedroom ranch house with a $180,000 mortgage and granite countertops she never used.

Even his parents seemed a little embarrassed. They didn't give him their new address for weeks, and when they finally invited him over, his mom said, "Don't mention the mobile home to the neighbors."

Sam didn't care.

Because here's what he understood that they didn't:

Wealth isn't what you show. It's what you own.

His sister's granite countertops? She'd pay $340,000 for them over thirty years, including interest.

His coworker's apartment? He'd pay $200,000 over the next twenty years and own nothing.

Sam's mobile home? He'd paid $9,200 cash and owned it free and clear.

Who was actually winning?

The property taxes were $380 a year in 2004. That's $32 a month.

By 2024, they'd gone up to $650 a year. That's $54 a month.

Still cheaper than a phone bill.

The mobile home itself? It didn't appreciate. Mobile homes almost never do. In fact, it probably depreciated to about $8,000 in value.

But the *land*? That was a different story.

That 0.4-acre lot in a good neighborhood appreciated steadily. By 2024, similar lots were selling for $35,000 to $40,000.

So Sam's $9,200 investment became a $40,000 asset over twenty years.

Not bad.

But that's not why Sam bought it.

He bought it because it freed up $650 a month that he could invest instead of giving to a landlord.

Let me show you what that meant.

If Sam had rented an apartment at $800/month (2004-2024):

20 years × 12 months × $800 = **$192,000 spent on rent**

Equity gained: **$0**

What Sam actually did:

Purchase price: $9,200
Property taxes (20 years): ~$10,000
Utilities (20 years): ~$28,000
Maintenance (new roof 2015, AC unit 2018, misc repairs): ~$8,000

Total 20-year cost: $55,200

Equity gained: **$40,000 (land value)**

Net cost: $15,200

Savings vs. renting: $176,800

But here's the real kicker:

Sam didn't just *save* $650 a month by living cheap.

He *invested* it.

Every single month, like clockwork, Sam took the money he wasn't spending on rent and put it into a Vanguard index fund.

$650 a month.

For twenty years.

At an average 10% annual return.

$650/month × 240 months = $156,000 invested

Ending value at 10% annual return: $492,000

Let me say that again.

By choosing to live in a $3,000 mobile home instead of an $800/month apartment, Sam turned $156,000 of disciplined saving into **$492,000** over twenty years.

That's the power of living below your means.

That's the power of investing the difference.

That's the power of not caring what other people think.

But it gets better.

Because Sam wasn't just saving on rent. He was also maxing out his employer's retirement match.

At Lincoln High School, the district matched employee retirement contributions dollar-for-dollar up to a certain amount. In 2004, that was about $1,830 a year.

So Sam contributed $1,830 of his own money, and the district added another $1,830.

Total annual retirement contribution: $3,660

He did this every single year from 2004 to 2024.

20 years × $3,660 average annual contribution = $73,200 total contributed

At 8% average annual return, that became **$247,000** in his retirement account by 2024.

Add that to the $492,000 in his personal index fund account, and Sam had:

$739,000 in investment accounts

Plus a $40,000 property.

Total net worth by 2011 (before Bitcoin): $93,000

Not bad for a guy making $32,000 a year who lived in a trailer.

And here's the thing that kills me:

I was making *more* than Sam during those same years.

As an owner-operator trucker, even in the down years, I was clearing $45,000 to $55,000.

But I was spending it all.

Truck payments. Fuel. Maintenance. Eating at truck stops because I was too tired to pack food. Staying at cheap motels when I couldn't sleep in the cab anymore.

I had zero savings.

Sam, making $20,000 less than me, had $93,000 saved by 2011.

Because he wasn't trying to impress anyone.

He wasn't embarrassed to live in a mobile home.

He wasn't ashamed to drive a fifteen-year-old truck.

He wasn't desperate to look successful.

He was just quietly, boringly, consistently building wealth.

When I met Sam for the first time last year, I asked him if he ever regretted buying the mobile home. If he ever wished he'd bought a "real" house.

He laughed.

"This *is* a real house. It's got four walls, a roof, a bathroom, and a kitchen. What else do I need? A two-story entryway I never use? A formal dining room for holidays I don't host? An extra bedroom for guests who never come?"

He shook his head.

"I've got 840 square feet. That's plenty. I know every inch of this place. I've fixed every leak, painted every wall, replaced every appliance. It's *mine.* Not the bank's. Mine."

He paused.

"You know what's in my garage right now? A nearly-new riding mower I bought for the school because the district's broke and the football field looked like crap. Cost me $3,200. Didn't even blink. You know why?"

I shook my head.

"Because I don't have a mortgage. I don't have rent. I don't have debt. So when I see something that needs fixing, I can just fix it. That's freedom. Not a big house. Not a fancy car. The ability to help when you want to help and not worry about money."

That's when I realized:

Sam wasn't cheap.

He was *free*.

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you exactly what Sam did with that freedom.

How he took his $93,000 net worth in 2011 and turned it into $8 million by 2024.

How he bought $500 worth of Bitcoin and sold it in pieces over the next decade, making every decision from a place of abundance instead of desperation.

How he stayed calm during crashes while everyone else panicked.

And how he retired at fifty—not because he was done working, but because he wanted to make sure the district couldn't find a replacement who cared as much as he did.

Because here's the secret Sam understood:

You don't need to make a lot of money to get rich.

You need to spend a lot less than you make and invest the difference for a long time.

That's it.

That's the whole formula.

Everything else is just details.

CHAPTER 5
The $500 Bet on the Future

April 2011. Sam Thornton was thirty-seven years old, sitting in the Lincoln High School cafeteria during his lunch break, eating the same thing he ate every day: a peanut butter and jelly sandwich he'd made at home, an apple, and a thermos of coffee.

Total cost: about eighty-five cents.

The teachers around him were complaining about money. Again.

"I don't know how they expect us to survive on these salaries," one said, stabbing at a $9 salad from the cafeteria. "I'm living paycheck to paycheck."

Another chimed in: "Same. Between my car payment, my mortgage, and daycare, I've got maybe $200 left at the end of the month. If that."

Sam didn't say anything. He never did during these conversations.

But he thought: *You make $52,000 a year. I make $38,000. And I've got $93,000 in the bank. Maybe the problem isn't your salary.*

He pulled out his phone and opened Reddit while they kept complaining.

Sam had discovered Reddit a few months earlier. Specifically, a section called r/personalfinance where people talked about budgeting, investing, and early retirement.

It was his kind of place. Practical. No-nonsense. People sharing actual numbers instead of just complaining.

That day, there was a post that caught his eye:

"Has anyone looked into Bitcoin? Seems interesting but also maybe insane?"

The comments were all over the place.

"It's a scam. Don't waste your money."

"I bought some at $0.30. Now it's at $2. Not sure if I should sell or hold."

"This is the future of money. Get in now or regret it forever."

"Literally just internet points. Has no value."

Sam had heard the word "Bitcoin" before but never paid attention. He clicked through to the linked article and started reading.

Digital currency. No banks. No government control. Limited supply. Peer-to-peer transactions.

His first thought: *This sounds like science fiction.*

His second thought: *So did the internet in 1995.*

Sam had been at Lincoln High since 2000. Eleven years. And in that time, he'd watched the school transform.

In 2000, there were two computers in the library. Teachers used overhead projectors and handwritten lesson plans. Students turned in papers on notebook paper.

By 2011, every classroom had a computer. Every student had an email address. Half the teachers were assigning homework online. The library had thirty computers and was packed every lunch period with kids doing research.

Sam had seen this pattern before: **What seems impossible becomes normal.**

In 2000, the principal had argued against "wasting money" on computers. "Kids need books, not screens," he'd said.

By 2005, that same principal was bragging about the school's "cutting-edge technology."

In 2002, the teachers' union fought against email communication with parents. "Too impersonal," they said.

By 2008, every teacher had a school email they checked daily.

Sam had learned something watching this evolution:

The people who resist change always lose. The people who adapt early always win.

So when he read about Bitcoin—a technology that most people were dismissing as crazy or impossible—he didn't immediately reject it.

He asked a different question:

In twenty years, will people be using this?

Over the next two weeks, Sam spent his lunch breaks reading everything he could find about Bitcoin.

He read the original whitepaper by someone called Satoshi Nakamoto. He didn't understand most of it—cryptography and hash functions and blockchain technology were way over his head—but he understood the core idea:

Money that exists on computers. That anyone can send to anyone else. Without asking permission from a bank or government.

He read about how there would only ever be 21 million Bitcoin. How no one could create more. How it was deflationary by design, unlike the dollar which the government could print infinitely.

He read stories from people who'd bought Bitcoin at $0.05 and watched it climb to $3. People who'd turned $100 into $6,000.

He also read stories from people who'd bought at $30 (the peak in June 2011) and watched it crash back to $2. People who'd lost thousands.

And he read all the warnings.

CNN said it was used by criminals.

Forbes said it was a bubble.

Financial advisors said it would be shut down by governments.

Technology experts said the blockchain was interesting but Bitcoin itself was worthless.

Sam sat with all of this information for a week.

He wasn't impulsive. Never had been. When he bought the mobile home, he'd spent three months researching tax sales and home renovation costs before bidding. When he chose his index funds, he'd read six different books on investing first.

So he made a list. Pros and cons.

Reasons Bitcoin might succeed:

1. The internet changed everything. Email replaced letters. Downloads replaced CDs. Why wouldn't money go digital too?
2. Limited supply. Only 21 million ever. Scarcity creates value.
3. No middleman. Send money anywhere, instantly, for almost no fee. Banks charge $25-$50 for international wire transfers.
4. Growing adoption. More people buying it every month. Network effects.
5. Young people understand it. Just like young people understood email before their parents did.

Reasons Bitcoin might fail:

1. Government crackdown. They could ban it.
2. Technical failure. Maybe the code has a flaw.

3. Better competitor. Maybe something else replaces it.
4. Adoption failure. Maybe people just never use it.
5. Volatility. It's gone from $0.05 to $30 to $2 in six months. That's terrifying.

Sam stared at his list.

Then he thought about something his grandfather had told him years ago:

"The best investments are the ones that make you a little nervous. If everyone's comfortable with it, you're already too late."

Bitcoin made him nervous.

Which meant maybe it was exactly the right time.

Sam had $93,000 in total net worth. $70,000 in index funds. $18,000 in his retirement account. $5,000 in cash as an emergency fund.

How much should he risk on something as volatile and uncertain as Bitcoin?

He pulled out a notebook and did the math.

If he invested $5,000 (about 5% of his net worth) and Bitcoin went to zero, he'd still have $88,000. It would sting, but it wouldn't destroy him.

If he invested $500 (about 0.5% of his net worth) and Bitcoin went to zero, he'd barely notice.

But if Bitcoin succeeded—really succeeded—even $500 could turn into something significant.

Conservative scenario: Bitcoin goes from $3 to $30 (10x). His $500 becomes $5,000.

Optimistic scenario: Bitcoin goes from $3 to $300 (100x). His $500 becomes $50,000.

Crazy scenario: Bitcoin goes from $3 to $3,000 (1000x). His $500 becomes $500,000.

Even the conservative scenario was incredible. Where else could he potentially 10x his money?

But the crazy scenario? That seemed impossible.

Except...

Sam thought about Apple stock. People who bought it in 2003 at $1 (split-adjusted) watched it go to $300 by 2011. That was a 300x return.

People who bought Amazon in 1997 at $1.50 watched it go to $180 by 2011. That was a 120x return.

Impossible things happen all the time. You just have to be early.

Sam made his decision.

He would invest $500.

Not $5,000. Not $1,000. Just $500.

An amount he could afford to lose completely without it affecting his life.

An amount small enough that he wouldn't panic-sell if it dropped.

An amount large enough that if it *did* succeed, it would matter.

The hard part was actually buying it.

In 2011, buying Bitcoin wasn't easy. There was no Coinbase. No user-friendly apps. You had to use something called Mt. Gox, a website that looked like it had been designed by a high school student.

Sam created an account. Linked his bank account. Waited three days for the verification to go through.

Then he placed his order.

$500 worth of Bitcoin at $1.50 per coin.

He got 333 Bitcoin.

The transaction went through on May 3rd, 2011.

Sam wrote down his password on a piece of paper, put it in a fireproof safe he kept in his closet, and tried to forget about it.

Here's what Sam didn't do:

He didn't tell anyone.

Not his parents. Not his coworkers. Not his friends.

Because he knew what would happen.

They'd tell him he was an idiot. They'd send him articles about how Bitcoin was a scam. They'd lecture him about "real investments" like real estate and mutual funds.

And if it failed, they'd say, "I told you so."

If it succeeded, they'd say, "You just got lucky."

So he kept it to himself.

Sam had learned a long time ago: **The crowd doesn't reward independent thinking. They punish it.**

If you're right and they're wrong, they resent you.

If you're wrong and they're right, they mock you.

Either way, you lose.

So Sam just stayed quiet and kept mopping floors.

By June 2011, Bitcoin hit $30.

Sam's $500 was worth $10,000.

He felt sick.

Not because he was losing money—because he was *winning* and didn't know what to do about it.

Should he sell? Take the profit? Lock in $9,500 in gains?

Or hold? See if it kept going?

He didn't know.

So he did what he always did when he didn't know: nothing.

He just held.

Two weeks later, Bitcoin crashed to $15.

His $10,000 was now $5,000.

He'd lost half his gains in fourteen days.

The forums were full of panic.

"SELL NOW BEFORE IT GOES TO ZERO!"

"I told you it was a bubble!"

"Everyone who didn't sell at $30 is an idiot!"

Sam read all of it. Felt the fear. Felt the urge to sell.

But then he asked himself a simple question:

Has anything fundamentally changed?

Bitcoin still had a limited supply. It still worked as a technology. It was still growing in adoption—just slower than the hype suggested.

The only thing that changed was the *price*. And price is just what people are willing to pay today. It doesn't change what something is actually worth.

So Sam held.

By November 2011, Bitcoin was back down to $2.

His $500 investment was worth $666.

He'd made $166. About 33%.

Not the $10,000 he'd had in June. But still a win.

And more importantly, he'd learned something:

Volatility is the price you pay for asymmetric returns.

If you want the chance to 10x or 100x your money, you have to be willing to watch it swing 50% up and 50% down and not panic.

Most people can't handle that. Most people sell at the bottom and miss the recovery.

Sam could handle it because he didn't *need* the money.

His mobile home was paid off. His expenses were low. His job was steady. He had $70,000 in index funds and $18,000 in retirement accounts.

The $500 in Bitcoin was play money. An experiment. A bet on the future.

If it went to zero, he'd be fine.

If it went to the moon, he'd be better than fine.

He had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

For the next two years, Sam didn't check the price.

He just kept living his life.

Mopping floors. Fixing broken things. Investing $650 a month into his index funds.

Every time Bitcoin was in the news—and it was, occasionally—he resisted the urge to log in and check his balance.

Because he knew what would happen: He'd see the price, feel either greed or fear, and make an emotional decision.

Better to just let it sit.

Then, in November 2013, Bitcoin started climbing again.

$100. Then $200. Then $400.

By December, it hit $1,000.

Sam's 333 Bitcoin were worth $333,000.

He'd turned $500 into a third of a million dollars.

He logged into Mt. Gox and stared at the number.

$333,000.

He could pay off his mobile home. Except it was already paid off.

He could buy a new truck. Except his 1995 Toyota was running fine.

He could quit his job. Except he liked his job.

What was he supposed to do with $333,000?

Sam sat at his kitchen table with a notebook and thought about it for three days.

He remembered something he'd read in one of his investing books:

"The goal isn't to get rich. The goal is to stay rich."

Right now, he was rich. On paper.

But Bitcoin had already proven it could crash 80% in a matter of weeks. What if it happened again?

If he held all 333 Bitcoin and it crashed back to $100, he'd be back to $33,000. Still a win, but a much smaller one.

If he sold everything and it went to $10,000, he'd miss out on $3.3 million.

So he made a plan:

Sell half. Hold half.

It wasn't fancy. It wasn't perfect. But it made sense.

If Bitcoin went to zero, he'd still walk away with life-changing money.

If Bitcoin went to $100,000, he'd still have massive gains.

Either way, he won.

On December 4th, 2013, Sam sold 166 Bitcoin at $1,000 each.

Total: $166,000

After taxes (he estimated 30% federal and state), he'd net about $116,000.

He left 167 Bitcoin in his account. Just in case.

Here's what Sam did with the $116,000:

$80,000 into Guaranteed Investment Certificates (GICs).

Boring. Safe. Guaranteed 3-4% annual return. He bought a five-year ladder so some would mature every year.

Why?

Because he wanted to make sure that even if Bitcoin went to zero, even if the stock market crashed, even if everything fell apart, he'd have $80,000 sitting in the safest possible investment earning steady interest.

$25,000 into his index fund.

Added to his existing balance, this brought his total index fund account to about $110,000.

$11,000 to taxes.

He set it aside in a separate savings account and paid the IRS when tax season came. No surprises. No penalties.

Total locked in: $116,000 after tax.

And he still had 167 Bitcoin sitting in his account, worth $167,000 at current prices.

Total net worth after the sale: $427,000

Plus his $40,000 mobile home.

Sam Thornton, a custodian making $38,000 a year, was worth just under half a million dollars at age thirty-nine.

And no one knew.

Here's what Sam didn't do:

He didn't buy a new car.

He didn't buy a bigger house.

He didn't tell his coworkers.

He didn't quit his job.

He just kept showing up every morning at 6 AM, mopping floors, fixing broken lockers, and eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in the cafeteria.

Because Sam understood something most people don't:

Wealth is what you keep, not what you spend.

The teachers around him were making more money than he was. But they were also spending more. They drove nicer cars, lived in bigger houses, took expensive vacations.

And they were still living paycheck to paycheck.

Sam made less, spent less, and was worth more than all of them combined.

Because he'd made one $500 bet on the future and had the discipline not to panic when it got scary.

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you what happened over the next eight years.

How Bitcoin crashed to $200 in 2015 and Sam held.

How it climbed to $20,000 in 2017 and Sam sold some more.

How it crashed to $3,000 in 2018 and Sam bought more.

How it hit $69,000 in 2021 and Sam made his final major sale.

And how, through all of it, he made every decision from abundance instead of desperation.

While I was selling horses at a loss and crying in rest stop bathrooms, Sam was calmly building an $8 million net worth.

Not because he was smarter.

Because he was prepared.

He had no debt. Low expenses. An emergency fund. A steady job he didn't hate.

So when opportunity showed up, he could take it.

And when volatility showed up, he could handle it.

That's the difference between us.

I was operating from scarcity.

Sam was operating from abundance.

And abundance wins. Every single time.

CHAPTER 6
The Crash and the Conviction

January 2014. Bitcoin was at $800.

Sam's remaining 167 Bitcoin were worth $133,600.

He'd already locked in $116,000 after taxes from his December 2013 sale. So his total Bitcoin gains (realized + unrealized) were sitting at $249,600.

A quarter of a million dollars from a $500 investment.

He should've felt like a genius.

Instead, he felt anxious.

The forums were going crazy. Everyone was predicting where Bitcoin would go next.

"$10,000 by end of year!"

"This is just the beginning!"

"We're going to $100,000!"

But there were other voices too:

"This is a bubble. Get out while you can."

"Mt. Gox is having withdrawal problems. Something's wrong."

"Governments are going to ban this."

Sam read everything. And the more he read, the more he realized: **No one actually knows what's going to happen.**

Everyone was guessing. Everyone was gambling. Everyone was either greed-drunk or fear-paralyzed.

Sam decided to do what he always did when the crowd got loud:

Stop listening.

By February 2014, Mt. Gox—the exchange where Sam (and most Bitcoin holders) kept their coins—went offline.

Just... disappeared.

Rumors started spreading. The exchange had been hacked. 850,000 Bitcoin had been stolen. People's accounts were frozen. Withdrawals weren't processing.

Sam tried to log in. The website wouldn't load.

He sat at his kitchen table and stared at his computer screen for twenty minutes.

Is it gone?

Did I just lose $133,600?

He felt sick. Not devastated—he'd already taken out more than double his initial investment. But still. Watching six figures evaporate is never fun.

Then he did something that would define his entire investing philosophy:

He accepted it.

Not with resignation. Not with bitterness. Just with calm acknowledgment.

I invested $500 in an experiment. The experiment paid me $116,000. If the rest goes to zero, I still won.

If it doesn't go to zero, I'll win even more.

Either way, I'm fine.

That acceptance—that ability to be okay with either outcome—is what separated Sam from everyone else who panicked and sold.

By March 2014, it became clear: Mt. Gox was bankrupt. 850,000 Bitcoin were gone. The exchange was dead.

But here's the thing people forget:

Mt. Gox failing wasn't the same as Bitcoin failing.

Bitcoin the technology still worked. The blockchain was still running. People were still making transactions. Other exchanges were still operating.

Mt. Gox was just a company. A poorly-run company that got hacked.

But the media didn't make that distinction.

"BITCOIN COLLAPSES" the headlines screamed.

"INVESTORS LOSE MILLIONS IN BITCOIN CRASH"

"THE END OF CRYPTOCURRENCY"

And the price reflected the fear.

Bitcoin dropped from $800 to $600. Then $400. Then $300.

By April, it was at $200.

Sam's 167 Bitcoin—which had been worth $133,600 in January—were now worth $33,400.

He'd "lost" $100,000 in three months.

Except he hadn't lost anything. Because he hadn't sold.

Here's what Sam did during the crash of 2014:

Nothing.

He didn't panic-sell. He didn't check the price obsessively. He didn't post on forums about how it was "going to the moon" or "going to zero."

He just kept mopping floors.

The teachers were still complaining about money. The students were still breaking lockers. The boiler still needed maintenance. Life went on.

Every two weeks, Sam's paycheck hit his account. Every month, he invested $650 into his Vanguard index fund.

The index fund was boring. It went up about 1% a month on average. Some months it dropped. Most months it climbed.

By the end of 2014, his index fund account had grown to $125,000. His GICs had $82,000. His retirement account had $34,000.

Total net worth (not counting Bitcoin): $241,000

And then there was the Bitcoin: 167 coins worth $56,278 at year-end price of $337.

Total net worth including Bitcoin: $297,278

He'd started 2014 at $427,000.

He'd ended at $297,000.

On paper, he'd "lost" $130,000.

But he didn't feel like he'd lost anything.

Because the fundamentals hadn't changed. Bitcoin still had a limited supply. It was still growing in adoption. The price was just... lower.

And Sam had learned something important:

Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.

The price had dropped. But the value—the actual utility of the technology—was the same.

So he held.

2015 was quiet. Boring. Exactly what Sam needed.

Bitcoin traded sideways between $200 and $300 all year. No big crashes. No massive rallies. Just... nothing.

The media stopped talking about it. The forums got quieter. Half the people who'd been screaming about Bitcoin in 2013 had moved on to the next thing.

Which was perfect.

Because Sam had learned that **the best time to buy is when no one cares.**

He didn't buy more Bitcoin in 2015—he'd already allocated what he was comfortable with. But he kept investing in his index funds. Kept adding to his emergency fund. Kept living below his means.

By the end of 2015:

- Index funds: $142,000
- GICs: $85,000
- Retirement: $40,000
- Bitcoin (167 @ $430): $71,810

Total: $338,810

He'd recovered most of his 2014 losses just by holding and staying calm.

2016 was when things started getting interesting again.

Bitcoin climbed from $430 to $600. Then $700. Then $900 by December.

Sam's 167 Bitcoin went from $71,810 to $150,300.

He'd almost doubled his Bitcoin holdings in one year.

But more importantly, his index funds kept grinding higher. His GICs kept paying interest. His retirement account kept compounding.

Total net worth end of 2016: $432,300

He'd surpassed his 2014 peak.

And he'd done it without doing anything except staying calm and staying consistent.

Then came 2017.

Bitcoin started the year at $1,000. By March, it was $1,200. By May, $2,500. By September, $4,000.

Sam's 167 Bitcoin were worth $668,000 in September 2017.

Combined with his other investments, his total net worth was over **$1.1 million**.

Sam Thornton, a forty-three-year-old custodian, was a millionaire.

And no one knew.

He sat in his mobile home that night and thought about what to do.

His brain was screaming: *SELL! LOCK IN THE GAINS! YOU'RE A MILLIONAIRE! TAKE THE MONEY!*

But his gut was saying something else: *Wait. This isn't done yet.*

Bitcoin had gone from $200 to $4,000 in three years. That's a 20x increase.

But what if it went to $10,000? To $50,000?

He could hold and potentially make millions more.

Or he could sell now and guarantee he'd never be poor again.

Sam made a list. Like he always did.

Reasons to sell now:

1. I'm a millionaire. Lock it in.
2. It's already gone 20x. How much higher can it go?
3. What if it crashes again like 2014?
4. I could retire right now if I wanted to.

Reasons to hold:

1. Adoption is still growing. More people buying Bitcoin every day.
2. Institutional investors starting to pay attention.
3. I don't need the money. Mobile home paid off, expenses low, job secure.
4. I already took profits in 2013. This is house money.
5. What if I'm wrong and it goes to $100,000? I'd regret selling at $4,000.

Sam decided to split the difference again.

Sell some. Hold some.

In October 2017, when Bitcoin hit $5,000, Sam sold 67 of his 167 Bitcoin.

67 × $5,000 = $335,000

After taxes (30%), he netted **$234,500**.

He put $150,000 into more GICs and bonds. Added $50,000 to his index funds. Kept $34,500 in cash for taxes and emergencies.

And he kept 100 Bitcoin. Just in case.

By December 2017, Bitcoin hit $20,000.

Sam's remaining 100 Bitcoin were worth $2,000,000.

Two million dollars.

He'd turned $500 into $2 million (unrealized) plus $350,500 (already cashed out and taxed).

Total Bitcoin gains: $2.35 million

Combined with his index funds ($220,000), GICs ($240,000), retirement ($52,000), and mobile home ($40,000)...

Sam's total net worth: $2.9 million

He was forty-three years old. He made $42,000 a year as a custodian.

And he was worth nearly **three million dollars**.

The teachers at lunch were talking about Bitcoin.

"Did you hear it hit $20,000? I should've bought some when it was cheap."

"My cousin bought some at $15,000. He's already up 30%!"

"I'm thinking about putting $10,000 in. It's going to $100,000 next year."

Sam ate his peanut butter and jelly sandwich and said nothing.

Because he knew what was about to happen.

He'd seen this before. The euphoria. The certainty. The "this time is different" mentality.

Everyone who'd ignored Bitcoin at $200 was now convinced it would go to $100,000.

Everyone who'd called it a scam in 2014 was now buying at all-time highs.

That's when Sam knew: **It's time to sell more.**

Not because Bitcoin was done. But because when everyone is euphoric, you take profits.

On December 17, 2017—three days before Bitcoin peaked at $19,783—Sam sold 50 more Bitcoin at $19,500.

50 × $19,500 = $975,000

After taxes: **$682,500**

He put $400,000 into GICs and treasury bonds. Added $200,000 to his index funds. Kept $82,500 for taxes and cash reserves.

And he kept his final 50 Bitcoin.

Total cash/investments: $1.4 million

Remaining Bitcoin (50 @ $20,000): $1 million

Total net worth: $2.4 million

Four days later, Bitcoin started falling.

$18,000. Then $15,000. Then $10,000.

By February 2018, it was at $6,000.

By December 2018, it was at $3,000.

Sam's remaining 50 Bitcoin dropped from $1,000,000 to $150,000.

He'd "lost" $850,000 in one year.

The forums exploded.

"I TOLD YOU IT WAS A BUBBLE!"

"BITCOIN IS DEAD!"

"EVERYONE WHO DIDN'T SELL AT $20K IS AN IDIOT!"

But Sam didn't feel like an idiot.

Because he'd already locked in $917,000 in after-tax profits.

His $500 investment had become:

- $116,000 (2013 sale)
- $234,500 (2017 sale #1)
- $682,500 (2017 sale #2)

Total realized gains: $1,033,000

Plus he still had 50 Bitcoin worth $150,000.

Total from Bitcoin: $1.183 million

And he still had his index funds, his GICs, his retirement account, his mobile home.

Total net worth (Dec 2018): $2.1 million

So yeah, he'd "lost" $850,000 on paper.

But he'd started with $500.

And he was still a multimillionaire.

Here's what Sam did in 2018 that most people didn't:

He bought more.

In December 2018, when Bitcoin hit $3,200 and everyone was declaring it dead, Sam took $32,000 from his cash reserves and bought 10 more Bitcoin.

Not because he was sure it would recover.

But because the same logic that made him buy at $1.50 in 2011 still applied at $3,200 in 2018:

Limited supply. Growing adoption. Long-term potential.

If it went to zero, he'd lose $32,000. Which would sting, but wouldn't destroy him.

If it recovered to $20,000, he'd make $168,000.

Asymmetric bet. Limited downside. Massive upside.

So he bought.

By the end of 2019, Bitcoin had recovered to $7,000.

Sam's 60 Bitcoin (50 remaining + 10 purchased) were worth $420,000.

His index funds had grown to $380,000.

His GICs and bonds: $450,000.

His retirement: $68,000.

Total net worth: $1.358 million

Then came 2020.

COVID hit. The stock market crashed. Bitcoin crashed to $4,000 in March.

Everyone panicked.

Except Sam.

Because Sam had spent the last nine years training himself not to panic.

He'd watched Bitcoin go from $3 to $30 to $2.

From $2 to $1,000 to $200.

From $200 to $20,000 to $3,000.

Every single time, the pattern was the same: Crash. Despair. Recovery. New high.

So when it crashed to $4,000 in March 2020, Sam didn't sell.

He bought $20,000 more.

5 more Bitcoin at $4,000 each.

By December 2020, Bitcoin was at $28,000.

Sam's 65 Bitcoin were worth $1.82 million.

By April 2021, Bitcoin hit $60,000.

Sam's 65 Bitcoin were worth $3.9 million.

By November 2021, Bitcoin peaked at $69,000.

Sam's 65 Bitcoin were worth **$4.485 million**.

Combined with his index funds ($520,000), bonds/GICs ($480,000), retirement ($95,000), and mobile home ($40,000)...

Total net worth: $5.62 million

Sam was forty-seven years old.

And he made a decision:

It's time to take most of the chips off the table.

Not because he thought Bitcoin was done. But because $5.6 million was more money than he'd ever need.

He could live on $40,000 a year comfortably. With $5 million invested at 5%, that's $250,000 a year in passive income.

He didn't need more.

So in November 2021, Sam sold 50 of his 65 Bitcoin at $65,000 each.

50 × $65,000 = $3.25 million

After taxes: **$2.275 million**

He kept 15 Bitcoin as "lottery tickets." If they went to $1 million each someday, great. If they went to zero, he'd still be fine.

Final Bitcoin summary:

- Started with: $500 (333 BTC in 2011)
- Sold over the years: 318 BTC for $4.608 million (pre-tax)
- After-tax proceeds: **~$3.2 million**
- Remaining: 15 BTC

Total invested: $552 (including the 2018 and 2020 purchases)

Total returned: $3.2 million cash + 15 BTC (currently worth ~$1.4 million)

Total gain: $4.6 million from $552

That's an 8,333x return.

By 2024, Sam's net worth breaks down like this:

- Index funds (20 years of $650/month): $492,000
- Retirement account (20 years of employer match): $247,000
- GICs/Bonds (Bitcoin profits): $3,200,000
- Remaining Bitcoin (15 @ $95,000): $1,425,000

- Additional index fund investments (from Bitcoin profits): $850,000
- Cash reserves: $180,000
- Mobile home + land: $40,000

Total net worth: $6.434 million

Let's round to **$6.5 million** to account for appreciation and dividends.

But when people ask Sam, he says **$8 million** because that includes the unrealized gains in his taxable accounts that will eventually be taxed at long-term capital gains rates, which effectively gives him about $1.5M more in spending power over his lifetime.

Here's what Sam learned from the wild years of 2014-2021:

Lesson 1: Volatility is not risk.

Risk is permanent loss of capital. Volatility is just price movement.

Bitcoin was volatile. But Sam never lost his Bitcoin. He just watched the price go up and down.

And because he didn't need the money, he could wait for the price to go back up.

Lesson 2: Take profits on the way up.

Sam didn't try to sell at the top. He just took profits whenever things felt euphoric.

2013 at $1,000? Sold half. 2017 at $5,000? Sold some. 2017 at $19,500? Sold more. 2021 at $65,000? Sold most of the rest.

He never timed it perfectly. But he didn't need to. He just needed to lock in gains along the way.

Lesson 3: Buy when everyone's scared.

2015 at $300? Held. 2018 at $3,200? Bought. 2020 at $4,000? Bought more.

Every time Bitcoin crashed and the media declared it dead, Sam either held or bought more.

Because he understood: **The best opportunities hide in the fear.**

Lesson 4: You can only hold through crashes if you're not desperate.

This is the big one.

Sam could hold because:

- His mobile home was paid off
- His expenses were $1,800/month
- He had $200,000+ in boring, safe investments
- He had a job he didn't hate
- He didn't need the Bitcoin money to survive

He was investing from abundance, not desperation.

That's why he won.

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you the final piece: How Sam is living in 2024.

What does a multimillionaire custodian's life actually look like?

Why he still works at the high school. What he does with his money.

And what he told me when I asked him, "Do you have any regrets?"

Because his answer changed how I think about wealth, success, and what actually matters.

Spoiler: He's still driving the same 2005 Toyota Tacoma.

Still living in the mobile home.

Still eating ham and cheese in the cafeteria.

And he's happier than every single person I know who's chasing the next big thing.

CHAPTER 7
The Millionaire in the Janitor's Closet

I met Sam Thornton on a Tuesday morning in October 2024.

I'd heard about him through a mutual acquaintance—a teacher at Lincoln High who'd mentioned in passing that their custodian was "weirdly smart about money" and had been working at the school for over twenty years despite probably being able to retire.

I was researching stories for this book. Looking for people who'd made different choices than I had. People who'd won where I'd lost.

So I reached out. Sent Sam an email through the school's website asking if I could interview him about his investment philosophy.

He responded three hours later:

"Sure. I take my lunch break at 11:30 in the cafeteria. Bring your own sandwich. Coffee's on me."

I showed up at 11:25.

Lincoln High School is a typical Midwestern public school. Red brick. Built in the 1960s. About 800 students. The kind of place where everyone knows everyone and the biggest news of the week is who won Friday's football game.

I found Sam in the cafeteria, sitting alone at a corner table, eating a sandwich and reading something on his phone.

He looked exactly like what you'd expect a fifty-year-old custodian to look like: Work boots. Navy blue Dickies work pants. A gray school district polo shirt with "Sam" embroidered on the chest. Slight build.

Calloused hands. The kind of guy you'd walk past a hundred times and never notice.

"You must be Rich," he said, standing up to shake my hand.

"And you must be Sam. Thanks for meeting with me."

"No problem. Want some coffee?"

He walked over to the teacher's lounge, poured two cups from the communal pot, and came back.

"So," he said, sitting down. "You want to know about Bitcoin."

"Actually," I said, "I want to know how a guy making $48,000 a year is worth $8 million and still shows up to work every day."

Sam smiled. "Well, that's a better question."

We talked for ninety minutes. I recorded the whole thing with his permission.

What follows is a condensed version of that conversation—the parts that hit me hardest, that made me rethink everything I thought I knew about money, success, and happiness.

ME: Let's start with the obvious question. You're worth $8 million. Why are you still working here?

SAM: Because I like it. I'm good at it. And they need me.

ME: Come on. You could retire tomorrow. Buy a house in Florida. Travel the world. Do whatever you want.

SAM: I am doing whatever I want. I'm fixing broken things, keeping the building running, and making sure these kids have a clean, safe place to learn. Why would I trade that for sitting on a beach alone?

ME: Most people would.

SAM: Most people hate their jobs. I don't. Why would I quit something I enjoy just because I don't need the paycheck anymore?

ME: So the money doesn't matter to you?

SAM: Of course it matters. But not the way you think. The money buys me freedom, not stuff. Freedom to say no to things I don't want to do. Freedom to help people without worrying about my own bills. Freedom to not care if I get fired tomorrow—which, ironically, makes me better at my job because I'm not afraid.

ME: What do you mean, freedom to help people?

SAM: Two years ago, the school's budget got cut. They couldn't afford new equipment for the gym. The floor polishers were shot. The basketball hoops needed replacing. The weight room equipment was from the 1990s. So I bought it. All of it. $47,000 worth of equipment. Didn't tell anyone it was me. Just had it delivered to the school with a note that said "From an anonymous donor."

ME: Why anonymous?

SAM: Because I didn't do it for credit. I did it because it needed to be done and I could do it. If people knew it was me, they'd treat me differently. They'd ask for money. They'd resent me. Or worse, they'd expect me to fix everything. I'd rather just be Sam the custodian who happens to occasionally buy things the school needs.

ME: You've done this more than once?

SAM: Yeah. New computers for the library. Scholarship fund for kids who can't afford college application fees. Paid off a teacher's medical bills when she got cancer and was about to lose her house. Always anonymous. Always quiet.

ME: How much have you given away total?

SAM: I don't keep track. Maybe $400,000 over the last few years? It's not like I'm keeping a ledger.

ME: Jesus. Most people who make that kind of money are buying Teslas and vacation homes.

SAM: And most people who make that kind of money are miserable. You ever notice that? The richer people get, the less happy they seem. They're stressed about losing it. Stressed about what people think. Stressed about keeping up appearances. I don't have any of that stress.

ME: Because you live in a mobile home.

SAM: Because I live below my means and don't care what people think.

ME: Let's talk about the mobile home. You bought it twenty years ago for $3,000. It's worth maybe $40,000 now. You're worth $8 million. Why haven't you upgraded?

SAM: Upgraded to what? A bigger house I don't need? More rooms I won't use? A mortgage or property taxes I'd have to think about?

ME: But don't you want... I don't know... something nicer?

SAM: Define "nicer." My mobile home is paid off. It's clean. It's comfortable. It's got everything I need—kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, living room. I've replaced the roof, the HVAC, the hot water heater. Everything works. Why would I trade that for a $300,000 house that costs me $15,000 a year in property taxes and maintenance?

ME: Because you can afford it.

SAM: Affording something and needing it are two different things. I can afford a Lamborghini. Should I buy one? I can afford a 5,000-square-foot house. Should I buy one? Just because you have money doesn't mean you should spend it on things that don't improve your life.

ME: So what does improve your life?

SAM: Time. Freedom. Generosity. Relationships. Knowing I can help someone without checking my bank account first. Knowing I don't have to work if I don't want to, which makes working a choice instead of a burden. That's what the money bought me. Not stuff.

ME: You mentioned you drive a 2005 Toyota Tacoma. Same reason?

SAM: Yep. Bought it used in 2007 for $12,000. It's got 310,000 miles on it. Runs great. I do all the maintenance myself. Why would I replace it?

ME: Because you're a multimillionaire and you could drive literally anything you want?

SAM: I could. But what would that get me? A nicer drive to work? The same parking spot in the school lot? Maybe some people would be impressed. But the people whose opinions I care about wouldn't care what I drive. And the people who would care aren't people whose opinions matter to me.

ME: Do people at the school know you're wealthy?

SAM: No. And I'd like to keep it that way.

ME: Not even the principal?

SAM: Especially not the principal. If he knew, he'd start treating me differently. He'd ask for donations. He'd expect me to fund things. Right now, I'm just Sam the custodian. I fix the boilers. I mop the floors. I hang Christmas lights in the gym. That's all anyone needs to know.

ME: Doesn't it bother you that people underestimate you?

SAM: Why would it? I know what I'm worth. My bank knows what I'm worth. God knows what I'm worth. Why do I need anyone else to know?

ME: Let me ask you something uncomfortable. Do you ever feel like you wasted your potential? Like maybe you should've done something bigger with your life?

SAM: (Long pause) That's a loaded question. What's "bigger"? Making more money? I've made more than most people will make in ten lifetimes. Achieving fame? I don't want to be famous. Climbing a corporate ladder? Why? So I can sit in meetings all day and stress about quarterly earnings?

ME: Fair point.

SAM: Here's what I've learned: Society tells you that success is climbing. Titles. Promotions. Bigger houses. Nicer cars. More, more, more. But that's not success. That's just accumulation. Real success is figuring out what actually makes you happy and doing that. For me, it's this. Fixing things. Helping kids. Living simply. Having time to read, to think, to help people quietly. That's my version of success.

ME: So you don't have any regrets?

SAM: I didn't say that.

ME: What do you regret?

SAM: I regret selling Bitcoin at $5,000 when it went to $69,000. I regret not buying more in 2015 when it was at $200. I regret not taking more risks when I was younger because I was worried about what people thought. But you know what I don't regret? I don't regret living in this mobile home. I don't regret driving my old truck. I don't regret working here. Because those choices gave me the freedom to take the risks I did take. And those risks changed my life.

ME: Let's talk about the Bitcoin decisions. You bought $500 worth in 2011. Sold some in 2013, 2017, 2021. Do you wish you'd held it all?

SAM: Of course. If I'd held all 333 Bitcoin to the 2021 peak, I'd have had $23 million instead of $8 million. But here's the thing: I would've never held it all. It's easy to say "I would've held" after the fact. But in the moment? When it crashes from $1,000 to $200 and everyone's saying it's dead? When you're watching $150,000 evaporate in three months? You don't know what you'd do until you're in it. And most people—99% of people—would've sold at the bottom.

ME: But you didn't.

SAM: I didn't sell at the bottom because I'd already taken profits at the top. That's the key. I sold half at $1,000 in 2013. So when it crashed to $200, I wasn't desperate. I'd already won. The rest was just... extra. That let me hold through the crash without panicking.

ME: So the secret to holding is taking profits?

SAM: The secret to holding is not needing the money. And the way to not need the money is to have a simple life, low expenses, and some profits already locked in. If you're desperate, you'll panic. If you're comfortable, you can wait.

ME: What about now? You still have 15 Bitcoin. Bitcoin's at $95,000. That's $1.4 million. Are you selling?

SAM: Nope.

ME: Why not?

SAM: Because I don't need $1.4 million. I've already got $6.5 million in boring, safe investments. Those 15 Bitcoin are my "just in case" money. Just in case Bitcoin goes to $1 million each. Just in case I'm right that it becomes the global reserve currency. Just in case I underestimated how big this could get. If it goes to zero, I'm still fine. If it goes to $1 million, I'll have $15 million. Either way, I win.

ME: That's a hell of a way to think about it.

SAM: It's the only way to think about it if you want to sleep at night.

ME: Do you ever think about what would've happened if you'd invested $5,000 instead of $500?

SAM: Sure. I'd have 3,330 Bitcoin instead of 333. At the peak, that would've been $230 million. But you know what? I wouldn't have held. If I'd put $5,000 in and watched it go to $200,000 in 2013, I would've sold everything. The only reason I held is because it was $500. An amount I could psychologically afford to lose. If it had been $5,000—10% of my net worth at the time—I would've panic-sold the first time it dropped 50%. So no, I don't regret only investing $500. That's exactly why I won.

ME: That's... actually brilliant.

SAM: It's not brilliant. It's just understanding your own psychology. Most people overinvest in risky stuff because they're greedy. Then they panic-sell because they can't handle the volatility. I invested an amount I could lose, which let me hold when it got volatile. That's not genius. That's just self-awareness.

ME: Okay, last question. If you could go back and give your 30-year-old self one piece of advice, what would it be?

SAM: (Doesn't hesitate) Stop caring what people think.

ME: That's it?

SAM: That's everything. Every mistake I made—every time I didn't take a risk, every time I played it safe, every time I second-guessed myself—it was because I was worried about what people would think. When I bought the mobile home, people laughed at me. When I kept driving my old truck, people judged me. When I didn't buy a bigger house or a nicer car, people thought I was cheap. And for a while, that bothered me. But once I stopped caring, everything got easier. I started making decisions based on what I wanted, not what would impress other people. And that's when my life actually started.

ME: So the secret to wealth is not caring what people think?

SAM: The secret to everything is not caring what people think. Wealth. Happiness. Peace. Freedom. All of it starts when you stop performing for an audience that doesn't matter.

We talked for another hour. About investing strategies. About regrets. About what he'd do differently.

But that line stuck with me:

"Stop performing for an audience that doesn't matter."

Because that's what I'd been doing my whole life.

I bought the horses because I wanted people to think I was smart. A successful entrepreneur. A guy who'd made it.

I drove a nice truck (before I had to sell it) because I wanted people to be impressed.

I spent money I didn't have on things I didn't need to impress people I didn't like.

And it cost me everything.

Sam, on the other hand, bought a $3,000 mobile home and drove a used Toyota and ate peanut butter sandwiches and didn't care if people thought he was broke.

And he became a multimillionaire.

Not because he was smarter.

Because he was free.

Free from needing approval. Free from needing to prove anything. Free from the weight of other people's expectations.

And that freedom let him make decisions based on logic instead of ego.

As I was leaving, I asked Sam one more question:

"Do you think you'll ever retire?"

He smiled.

"I am retired. I'm just choosing to work. That's the difference."

I drove home that day and sat in my driveway for twenty minutes, thinking.

Sam Thornton, a custodian making $48,000 a year, was freer than almost anyone I'd ever met.

He had no debt. No mortgage. No car payment. No stress about money. No fear of losing his job. No need to impress anyone.

He woke up every day and did work he enjoyed because he wanted to, not because he had to.

He gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars and no one knew.

He was worth $8 million and lived in a mobile home.

And he was genuinely, deeply happy.

Meanwhile, I'd spent twenty years chasing money, chasing approval, chasing the next big thing.

And I'd ended up broke, bitter, and full of regrets.

The difference between us wasn't intelligence.

It wasn't luck.

It wasn't even the Bitcoin.

The difference was that Sam had figured out what actually mattered. And I hadn't.

He'd built a life where money served him instead of him serving money.

And that, I realized, was the real secret.

Not how to get rich.

But how to build a life where being rich doesn't even matter.

In the next chapter, I'm going to break down the neuroscience of why Sam succeeded and I failed.

Why his brain was wired for long-term thinking and mine was stuck in short-term survival mode.

Why he could hold through crashes and I would've panic-sold.

Why he lived below his means and I couldn't resist spending.

Because the difference between wealth and poverty isn't just about decisions.

It's about the brain that makes those decisions.

And if you understand how your brain works—and how to rewire it—you can become Sam instead of me.

Even if you're starting from zero.

Even if you've already made mistakes.

Even if you think it's too late.

It's not.

I'm proof of that.

Because I'm writing this book not as a winner, but as a student.

Learning from the man who made $8 million while I lost $1 billion.

The janitor who was wiser than the entrepreneur.

The custodian who understood wealth better than the millionaires.

Sam Thornton.

The wealthiest man I've ever met.

And the happiest.

CHAPTER 9
The Biblical Millionaire Mind

Sam Thornton keeps a worn paperback Bible on his kitchen table.

King James Version. Leather cover cracked and faded from years of handling. Pages dog-eared and underlined in blue pen.

I noticed it during our second conversation, when Sam invited me to his mobile home to continue our discussion.

"You religious?" I asked.

"Depends on what you mean by religious," Sam said. "If you mean do I go to church every Sunday and follow all the rules? No. If you mean do I try to live according to what Jesus actually taught? Yeah, I try."

"What's the difference?"

Sam smiled. "Most churches teach you to be poor. Jesus taught you to be a steward. Big difference."

I need to be honest with you: I was raised Christian. Went to church as a kid. Stopped going in my twenties because I couldn't reconcile what they taught with what I saw.

The message I heard in church was: **Money is evil. Rich people go to hell. Store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven.**

So I internalized this belief: **Good Christians are supposed to be poor.**

And if you're rich, you're probably greedy, selfish, and going to hell.

This created a strange psychological split in me:

- I wanted to be rich (who doesn't?)
- But I felt guilty for wanting to be rich
- So I self-sabotaged every time I got close

I'd make money, then immediately spend it on something stupid. Because deep down, I believed having money made me a bad person.

Sam, on the other hand, had figured out something I hadn't:

The Bible doesn't teach poverty. It teaches stewardship.

And stewardship is the exact opposite of poverty theology.

"Let me show you something," Sam said, opening his Bible.

He flipped to a passage in Luke 19:12-26. The Parable of the Ten Minas.

"You know this one?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"It's about a nobleman who gives his servants money and tells them to 'occupy till I come'—basically, do business until I get back. One servant turns his one mina into ten. Another turns his one mina into five. A third buries his mina in the ground because he's afraid."

Sam looked up. "What happens to the guy who buried his money?"

"I don't know. He gets praised for being safe and conservative?"

"Nope. He gets rebuked. The master calls him wicked and takes away his mina and gives it to the guy who made ten."

I blinked. "Wait. So Jesus is saying you should invest money and take risks?"

"Exactly. The guy who buried his money—who played it safe—is the one who gets punished. The guys who took risks and multiplied what they were given are the ones who get rewarded."

Sam let that sink in.

"Now let me ask you: What did I do in 2011?"

"You invested $500 in Bitcoin."

"Right. I took what I was given—my paycheck, my savings—and I occupied with it. I put it to work. I took a calculated risk. And it multiplied."

"And me?"

"You buried it. You put your $15,000 into horses that you thought were safe. You didn't take the risk. And you lost it."

I sat with that for a long time.

"So God wanted me to buy Bitcoin?"

Sam laughed. "God doesn't care about Bitcoin. But He does care about stewardship. He gave you resources. He gave you an opportunity. And you were too afraid to use it. That's the problem."

The Poverty Theology Lie:

Most churches teach some version of this:

"Money is the root of all evil."

But that's not what the Bible actually says.

The verse is 1 Timothy 6:10: **"For the love of money is the root of all evil."**

Not money. The *love* of money.

Big difference.

Sam explained it like this:

"Money is neutral. It's a tool. Like a hammer. You can use a hammer to build a house or kill someone. The hammer isn't good or evil. It's what you do with it."

"So money isn't evil?"

"No. Greed is evil. Hoarding is evil. Selfishness is evil. But money itself? It's just paper. Or in Bitcoin's case, code."

He flipped to another passage. Proverbs 13:22:

"A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous."

"See that?" Sam said. "The Bible says a *good man* leaves wealth to his grandchildren. Not a greedy man. Not a selfish man. A good man. Which means wealth isn't incompatible with goodness. It's part of it."

The Stewardship Mindset:

Sam's entire financial philosophy came from one concept: **Stewardship.**

Steward = someone who manages resources that don't belong to them.

"Everything I have is on loan from God," Sam said. "My paycheck. My savings. My Bitcoin. None of it is really mine. I'm just managing it for Him."

"So if it's not yours, why do you care about growing it?"

"Because that's the job. A steward's job is to multiply what he's been given. Not bury it. Not waste it. Not hoard it. Multiply it."

This was a completely different framework than I'd ever heard.

Most pastors I'd heard preached: **Give everything away. Don't store up wealth. Live poor.**

Sam was saying: **Grow wealth responsibly so you have more to give and more to leave behind.**

The Three Principles of Biblical Wealth:

Sam had boiled down the Bible's teaching on money into three principles. He kept them written on an index card tucked into his Bible.

1. Earn Honestly

Proverbs 13:11: *"Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it."*

Sam's interpretation: "Don't chase get-rich-quick schemes. Don't cheat. Don't lie. Don't exploit people. Build wealth slowly, honestly, consistently."

"That's why I invested in index funds for seven years before Bitcoin showed up. I was building slowly. Honestly. When Bitcoin came along, I already had a foundation. So I could take the risk."

2. Save Diligently

Proverbs 21:20: *"Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling, but a foolish man devours it."*

Sam's interpretation: "The wise man saves. The fool spends everything. It's that simple."

"I lived in a mobile home and drove an old truck because I was saving. Not hoarding—saving with a purpose. Building an emergency fund. Building investments. So when opportunity came, I was ready."

3. Give Generously

Proverbs 11:24-25: *"One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered."*

Sam's interpretation: "The more you give, the more you'll have. Not because of karma or magic. Because generosity creates abundance in your soul. It trains your brain to operate from abundance instead of scarcity."

"I've given away over $400,000 in the last few years. And every time I give, I feel richer. Not poorer."

The Poverty Theology That Keeps People Broke:

Sam had strong opinions about what he called "poverty theology."

"There are two extremes in the church," he said. "Prosperity gospel on one side. Poverty theology on the other. Both are wrong."

Prosperity Gospel: God wants you rich. If you have enough faith, you'll be a millionaire. Send me $1,000 and God will give you $10,000 back.

"That's garbage," Sam said. "It's manipulation. It turns God into a vending machine. Put in faith, get out money. That's not how it works."

Poverty Theology: Money is evil. Rich people are greedy. You should give away everything and live poor to be holy.

"That's also garbage," Sam said. "It turns poverty into a virtue. But the Bible never says poverty is holy. It says *contentment* is holy. You can be content with little or content with much. The key is contentment, not poverty."

"So what's the right view?"

"Stewardship. God gives you resources. Your job is to manage them well. Grow them. Use them to bless others. And be content no matter how much you have."

The Joseph Principle:

Sam's favorite biblical example of stewardship was Joseph from Genesis.

"Joseph's story is the whole blueprint," Sam said.

Here's the summary:

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Ended up in Egypt. Rose to power. Interpreted Pharaoh's dream: Seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine.

Joseph's advice? **Save during abundance. Prepare for famine.**

Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the entire economy. Joseph stored 20% of Egypt's grain during the seven good years. When the famine hit, Egypt had food while everyone else starved.

Joseph saved a nation because he understood stewardship.

"That's what I did," Sam said. "I lived through my own seven years of abundance—2004 to 2011. I saved during those years. Built my emergency fund. Built my index funds. When Bitcoin showed up, I was ready. When it crashed in 2014, I didn't panic because I had my grain stored up."

"What about me?"

"You spent your abundance on horses. When the famine came—the market crash, the expenses—you had nothing stored up. So you lost everything."

I felt that in my chest.

The Grain Storage Today:

Sam showed me his "grain storage" in modern terms:

Emergency Fund (GICs/Bonds): $3.2 million

- This is his seven-year famine fund
- If the stock market crashes, if Bitcoin goes to zero, if the economy collapses, he's fine
- He can live on $40,000/year for 80 years with this money

Index Funds: $1.3 million

- Long-term growth
- Diversified across thousands of companies

- Boring, steady, reliable

Bitcoin: $1.4 million (15 BTC)

- High-risk, high-reward
- Only 17% of his portfolio
- Could go to zero, could go to $10 million
- Either way, he's fine

"See the structure?" Sam asked. "I've got my grain stored in three silos. If one fails, I'm still okay. That's stewardship. Not putting all your eggs in one basket."

The Tithe Question:

I had to ask: "Do you tithe?"

Tithing = giving 10% of your income to the church.

Sam paused. "Depends on how you define tithe."

"What do you mean?"

"If you mean, do I give 10% of my paycheck to a church building every week? No. If you mean, do I give away at least 10% of everything I make? Yes. Way more than 10%, actually."

"Where does it go?"

"Wherever it's needed. I've paid medical bills for people who couldn't afford them. I've funded scholarships. I've bought equipment for the school. I've helped single moms pay rent. I don't give to institutions. I give to people."

"Why?"

"Because Jesus didn't say, 'Give 10% to the religious leaders.' He said, 'Give to the poor. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked.' So that's what I do."

"How much have you given total?"

"Over $400,000 in the last few years. Probably close to $500,000 if I count everything."

That's about 7% of his net worth.

"And you don't feel like you're losing it?"

"No. I feel like I'm using it. Money sitting in an account doing nothing is wasted. Money changing someone's life is doing what it's supposed to do."

The Widow's Mite:

Sam told me about a passage in Mark 12:41-44.

Jesus is watching people give money at the temple. Rich people are throwing in large amounts. A poor widow puts in two small copper coins—worth almost nothing.

Jesus says: *"This poor widow has put in more than all of them. They gave out of their abundance. She gave out of her poverty—everything she had."*

"Most people read that and think Jesus is praising poverty," Sam said. "But that's not the point. The point is generosity relative to what you have. The widow gave 100% of what she had. The rich people gave 1%. Who was more generous?"

"The widow."

"Right. So the question isn't how much you give in dollars. It's what percentage you give relative to what you have."

Sam gave away $400,000+. That's 7% of his $6 million net worth (not counting the mobile home).

Most millionaires give less than 2%.

"By that standard," Sam said, "I'm not generous enough. I should be giving more."

The Rich Young Ruler:

I brought up the verse that always bothered me: The rich young ruler.

In Matthew 19, a rich man asks Jesus how to get eternal life. Jesus tells him to sell everything and give it to the poor.

The man walks away sad because he's very rich.

Jesus says: *"It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

"That always made me think being rich is a sin," I said.

Sam shook his head. "You're missing the point. Jesus wasn't saying wealth is evil. He was exposing what the rich man *worshiped*. Jesus told him to give away his wealth because his wealth was his god. It owned him. He couldn't let it go."

"So it's not about being rich or poor?"

"No. It's about what you worship. If you worship money, Jesus will tell you to get rid of it. If you worship God and use money as a tool, you're fine."

"How do you know which one you are?"

"Ask yourself: If God told you to give away all your money tomorrow, could you do it?"

I thought about it. Honestly? No. I'd panic.

Sam thought about it. "Yeah. I could. It would hurt. But I'd do it."

"Because you don't worship money?"

"Because I worship something bigger than money."

The Bigger Thing:

I asked Sam what he worshiped if not money.

"Purpose," he said. "I want to leave this place better than I found it. I want the kids at this school to have opportunities I didn't have. I want to help people who are struggling. That's what drives me. The money is just a tool to do that."

He showed me a list he kept in his Bible. It was titled: **"What I'm Building."**

The list:

1. A fully-funded scholarship program for Lincoln High students (goal: $1 million endowment)
2. A trade skills workshop for kids who don't want college (goal: $200,000 for equipment and instructors)
3. An emergency fund for teachers facing financial hardship (goal: $500,000)
4. A local food bank expansion (goal: $100,000)

"These are the things I think about," Sam said. "Not buying a bigger house. Not retiring early to play golf. This. Building things that last longer than me."

"How much have you funded so far?"

"About $150,000 into the scholarship fund. $50,000 into the food bank. The other two are still in planning."

"Why don't you just retire and run these full-time?"

"Because I'm not done being a custodian yet. This school still needs me. And I can fund these projects from my investments while I work. Why quit?"

The Biblical Framework Summary:

Sam's entire financial life was built on these biblical principles:

1. Everything is on loan from God. You're just the manager.

- This removes greed (it's not mine to hoard)
- This removes fear (if I lose it, God will provide)

2. Your job is to multiply what you've been given.

- This justifies taking risks (the buried talent gets punished)
- This justifies investing (stewards grow wealth)

3. Store up grain during abundance. Prepare for famine.

- This justifies saving (Joseph saved Egypt)
- This justifies emergency funds (wisdom, not fear)

4. Give generously from what you've grown.

- This removes scarcity thinking (the more you give, the more you have)
- This creates purpose (money serves something bigger)

5. Contentment is the goal, not wealth.

- This allows you to live in a mobile home with $8 million and be happy
- This prevents lifestyle inflation
- This keeps you free

"Here's the secret," Sam said. "Poor people and rich people both worship money. Poor people worship it because they don't have it. Rich people worship it because they do. The key is to not worship it at all. Use it. Grow it. Give it. But don't worship it."

"How do you do that?"

"You find something bigger to worship. For me, it's serving God by serving people. The money is just a tool to do that better."

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you the practical framework Sam used to build his wealth.

The actual numbers. The actual strategy. The actual decisions.

Because biblical principles are great. But you also need a plan.

And Sam's plan was simple enough that anyone can follow it.

Including you.

Including me.

Even if you're starting from zero.

CHAPTER 8
The Neuroscience of Why Sam Won and I Lost

After meeting Sam, I couldn't stop thinking about one question:

What was different about his brain?

Not his intelligence—I'm not stupid, and Sam's not a genius. We're both regular guys.

Not his education—I graduated high school, he graduated high school. Neither of us went to college.

Not his opportunities—we both heard about Bitcoin at the same time, in the same year, from the same sources.

So what made him capable of buying and holding while I would've panic-sold?

What made him content in a mobile home while I needed a 40-acre property to feel successful?

What made him patient enough to wait twenty years for compound interest while I was bleeding money trying to get rich quick with horses?

The answer, I discovered, is in the brain itself.

And once you understand how the brain works—and more importantly, how to rewire it—you can train yourself to think like Sam instead of like me.

Let me start with a simple truth that most people don't know:

Your brain is not designed to make you rich. It's designed to keep you alive.

Specifically, it's designed to keep you alive in a world that hasn't existed for 10,000 years.

A world where:

- Food is scarce (so eat as much as you can, whenever you can)
- Threats are everywhere (so be afraid of anything unfamiliar)
- Status determines survival (so constantly compare yourself to others)
- The future is uncertain (so focus on immediate rewards)

This worked great when we were hunting woolly mammoths and avoiding saber-toothed tigers.

It works *terribly* in a world of Bitcoin, index funds, and compound interest.

Let me show you exactly what I mean.

The Brain System That Made Me Fail:

When I sat in that truck stop in 2011, staring at the "Buy Bitcoin" button, here's what was happening in my brain:

Step 1: My prefrontal cortex (thinking brain) analyzed the opportunity.

This is the part of your brain right behind your forehead. It's responsible for:

- Long-term planning
- Logical analysis
- Risk assessment
- Impulse control

My prefrontal cortex looked at Bitcoin and thought: *"This is interesting. Limited supply. Growing adoption. Could be huge. I should invest."*

Step 2: My amygdala (fear brain) detected a threat.

This is an almond-shaped cluster of neurons deep in your brain. It's responsible for:

- Fear responses
- Threat detection
- Survival instincts
- Emotional reactions

My amygdala heard "FBI investigation" and "criminal activity" and "scam" and immediately flooded my system with stress hormones:

- Cortisol (makes you anxious)
- Adrenaline (makes you want to run)

Step 3: My amygdala hijacked my prefrontal cortex.

Here's the problem: When your amygdala detects a threat, it can literally *shut down* your prefrontal cortex.

It's called an "amygdala hijack."

Your thinking brain goes offline. Your fear brain takes over.

And when your fear brain is in control, you make decisions based on one question:

"Will this kill me?"

Bitcoin felt dangerous. Unfamiliar. Risky.

Horses felt safe. Familiar. Real.

So I chose horses.

Not because it was the smarter choice.

Because my amygdala was screaming, and I couldn't think clearly.

The Brain System That Made Sam Win:

Sam's brain did something different.

When Sam read about Bitcoin, his amygdala activated too. He felt fear. He felt uncertainty.

But here's the key difference:

Sam's prefrontal cortex stayed online.

Instead of letting fear make the decision, Sam's thinking brain asked a different set of questions:

1. **"What's the actual risk?"** (Not "how does this feel?" but "what are the facts?")
2. **"What's the downside?"** ($500 lost)
3. **"What's the upside?"** (Potentially life-changing)
4. **"Can I afford the downside?"** (Yes, $500 won't destroy me)
5. **"Is this worth the experiment?"** (Yes)

Notice the difference?

My brain asked: **"Is this dangerous?"**

Sam's brain asked: **"Is this dangerous** *enough to avoid***?"**

That's the difference between fear-based thinking and risk-based thinking.

Fear asks: "Could I lose?"

Risk asks: "How much could I lose, and can I afford it?"

Why Sam's Brain Worked Differently:

This wasn't genetics. Sam wasn't born with a better brain.

It was training.

Over the previous seven years (2004-2011), Sam had been training his brain to:

1. **Delay gratification**
2. **Ignore social pressure**
3. **Think long-term**
4. **Operate from abundance instead of scarcity**

Let me show you how each of these rewired his brain.

TRAINING #1: Delay Gratification (Strengthening the Prefrontal Cortex)

When Sam bought the $3,000 mobile home instead of renting a nicer apartment, he was training his brain to choose long-term gain over short-term comfort.

Every time you delay gratification, you strengthen the connection between your prefrontal cortex and your reward system.

It's like lifting weights for your self-control.

What Sam did:

- Lived in a mobile home (delayed the gratification of a "nice" house)
- Drove an old truck (delayed the gratification of a "nice" car)
- Ate ham and cheese instead of buying lunch (delayed the gratification of restaurant food)
- Invested $650/month instead of spending it (delayed gratification every single month)

What this did to his brain:

Every time Sam chose the long-term option, his brain released a small hit of dopamine (the reward chemical) *from making the smart choice*, not from spending the money.

Over time, his brain learned: **"Smart decisions feel good. Delayed gratification feels good."**

This is called "neuroplasticity"—your brain physically rewires itself based on repeated behaviors.

After seven years of this, Sam's prefrontal cortex was like a bodybuilder's bicep. Strong. Trained. Capable of overpowering the amygdala's fear response.

What I did:

I spent money as soon as I made it.

New truck. Nice dinners. The horses. The well.

Every time I got money, I immediately converted it into something tangible.

What this did to my brain:

My brain learned: **"Spending feels good. Immediate gratification feels good."**

My prefrontal cortex never got trained. It stayed weak.

So when the Bitcoin decision came, my weak prefrontal cortex couldn't overpower my amygdala's fear.

Fear won.

TRAINING #2: Ignore Social Pressure (Reducing Amygdala Sensitivity)

When Sam bought the mobile home, people judged him.

His coworkers laughed. His sister was embarrassed. Even his parents were uncomfortable.

But Sam didn't change his behavior.

He kept living in the mobile home. Kept driving the old truck. Kept eating cheap lunches.

What this did to his brain:

Every time someone judged him and nothing bad happened, his amygdala learned: **"Social disapproval is not a threat. I can ignore it."**

Over time, his amygdala became less sensitive to social pressure.

Neuroscientists call this "extinction training"—repeatedly exposing yourself to a feared stimulus (judgment) without a negative outcome (actual harm) until your brain stops reacting.

After years of being judged and being fine, Sam's amygdala stopped firing when people criticized his choices.

He literally became immune to peer pressure at a neurological level.

What I did:

I cared deeply about what people thought.

I bought the horses partly because I wanted people to think I was successful.

I spent money on things that would impress people.

What this did to my brain:

My amygdala learned: **"Social disapproval is dangerous. Avoid it at all costs."**

So when I was sitting in that truck stop, my amygdala wasn't just afraid of losing money.

It was afraid of looking stupid.

And that fear was so powerful it overrode my logical thinking.

TRAINING #3: Think Long-Term (Strengthening Future Self Connection)

Neuroscientists have discovered something fascinating:

Most people's brains treat their future self like a stranger.

When you imagine "future you," your brain lights up the same regions as when you think about other people.

You literally don't identify with your future self.

Which means: **You don't make decisions that benefit a stranger.**

Sam's brain was different.

What Sam did:

For seven years before buying Bitcoin, Sam made decisions that benefited his future self:

- Bought the mobile home (future Sam wouldn't have rent)
- Invested $650/month (future Sam would be wealthy)
- Lived below his means (future Sam would have freedom)

Every month, Sam visualized his future self. He thought about the 50-year-old version of himself who wouldn't have to work.

What this did to his brain:

Brain scans show that when you repeatedly visualize your future self, the neural pathways between "current you" and "future you" strengthen.

Your brain starts to recognize future you as *actually you*.

Which means you start making decisions that benefit future you, because you genuinely care about that person.

Sam's brain saw "60-year-old Sam" as real. As important. As worth protecting.

So when he invested $500 in Bitcoin, he was investing for that future version of himself.

What I did:

I barely thought past next month.

I was so focused on immediate problems (truck payments, fuel costs, keeping the horses fed) that I never visualized future me.

What this did to my brain:

Future me was a stranger. An abstract concept.

So when I had $15,000 to invest, I didn't think: "What would 60-year-old me want me to do with this?"

I thought: "What does current me want to do with this?"

And current me wanted horses. Now.

TRAINING #4: Operate from Abundance (Reducing Scarcity Response)

This is the most important one.

Your brain has two modes: Scarcity Mode and Abundance Mode.

Scarcity Mode:

- Activated when you feel you don't have enough
- Narrows your focus to immediate survival
- Triggers fear, anxiety, impulsive decisions
- Shuts down creativity and long-term thinking
- Makes you desperate

Abundance Mode:

- Activated when you feel you have enough
- Expands your focus to long-term opportunities
- Triggers curiosity, creativity, strategic thinking
- Allows you to take calculated risks
- Makes you calm

Here's the key: **These modes are based on perception, not reality.**

You don't need to be a millionaire to operate from abundance.

You just need to feel like you have enough.

What Sam did:

By 2011, Sam had:

- No debt
- A paid-off home

- $70,000 in index funds
- $18,000 in retirement
- $5,000 emergency fund
- A job he liked
- Monthly expenses of $1,800

He felt abundant. Because relative to his needs, he *was* abundant.

So when Bitcoin showed up, his brain was in Abundance Mode:

- "I have enough. This $500 is extra. I can afford to experiment."
- Calm. Strategic. Long-term thinking.

What I did:

By 2011, I had:

- Debt (truck payment)
- No emergency fund
- Declining income
- Rising expenses
- Constant stress about money

I felt scarce. Because relative to my expenses, I *was* scarce.

So when Bitcoin showed up, my brain was in Scarcity Mode:

- "I can't afford to lose $15,000. I need guaranteed returns. I need something safe."
- Desperate. Fearful. Short-term thinking.

Here's the brutal truth:

I had *more money* than Sam in 2011.

But I was operating from scarcity.

Sam had *less money* than me.

But he was operating from abundance.

Abundance isn't about how much you have. It's about the ratio of what you have to what you need.

Sam needed $1,800/month. He had way more than that covered.

I needed $4,000+/month. I barely covered that.

So Sam's brain could take risks.

My brain could only survive.

The Brain Science of Holding Through Crashes:

Now let's talk about why Sam could hold Bitcoin through the 2014 crash and I would've panic-sold.

When Bitcoin dropped from $1,000 to $200, Sam's brain experienced pain. Real, measurable pain.

Brain scans show that losing money activates the same brain regions as physical pain.

So Sam's brain was screaming: **"SELL! STOP THE PAIN!"**

But here's what let him hold:

1. His amygdala wasn't in control.

Because Sam had low expenses and high savings, his survival wasn't threatened by the crash.

His amygdala activated (fear response), but it didn't hijack his prefrontal cortex.

So he could think: *"This hurts, but it's not killing me. What does the data say?"*

2. His prefrontal cortex asked better questions.

Instead of: *"Should I sell?"* (fear-based question)

He asked: *"Has anything fundamentally changed?"* (logic-based question)

Bitcoin still had limited supply. Still had growing adoption. Still had the same potential.

The only thing that changed was the price.

Price is temporary. Fundamentals are permanent.

3. He had emotional circuit breakers.

Sam had already taken profits in 2013. He'd locked in $116,000.

So when the remaining Bitcoin crashed, he could think: *"Even if this goes to zero, I already won."*

That removed the desperation. Which kept his amygdala calm. Which let his prefrontal cortex stay online.

What would've happened to me:

If I'd bought Bitcoin at $3 and watched it go to $1,000, I would've felt like a genius.

Then when it crashed to $200, I would've felt like an idiot.

And my brain, operating from scarcity, would've screamed: **"SELL BEFORE YOU LOSE EVERYTHING!"**

My amygdala would've hijacked my prefrontal cortex.

I would've sold at $200.

Missed the recovery to $20,000.

And spent the rest of my life regretting it.

Just like I spent the rest of my life regretting not buying Bitcoin in the first place.

How to Rewire Your Brain to Think Like Sam:

Here's the good news:

You can train your brain to operate like Sam's.

It's not fast. It's not easy. But it's possible.

Here's how:

Step 1: Reduce your expenses below your income.

This is non-negotiable.

If you're spending everything you make (or more), your brain will stay in Scarcity Mode forever.

And Scarcity Mode makes terrible investment decisions.

You need a gap. Even a small one.

If you make $3,000/month and spend $2,500, you have $500/month of breathing room.

That $500 trains your brain: *"I have more than I need. I'm safe."*

Step 2: Build an emergency fund.

Even $1,000 in savings changes your brain.

Studies show that people with emergency funds have lower cortisol levels (stress hormone) and make better long-term decisions.

Your amygdala calms down because it knows: *"If something goes wrong, we have a buffer."*

Target: 3-6 months of expenses.

Start with $1,000.

Step 3: Practice delayed gratification.

Every time you choose the long-term option over the short-term option, you strengthen your prefrontal cortex.

Examples:

- Cook at home instead of eating out (save $10, strengthen brain)
- Buy used instead of new (save $200, strengthen brain)

- Invest $100 instead of spending it (save $100, strengthen brain)

Do this consistently for six months and you'll notice your impulse control improving.

Step 4: Expose yourself to social discomfort.

This trains your amygdala to stop reacting to judgment.

Examples:

- Drive an older car than you can afford (people will judge you—good)
- Live in a smaller place than your income suggests (people will judge you—good)
- Tell people you're "not interested" in expensive vacations/cars/whatever (people will judge you—good)

Each time someone judges you and nothing bad happens, your amygdala learns: *"Social disapproval is not a threat."*

Step 5: Visualize your future self.

Spend 5 minutes every morning imagining yourself at age 60 or 70.

Picture them clearly. What do they look like? What's their life like?

Then ask: *"What decision would make future me grateful?"*

Do this daily for 30 days and brain scans will show increased connectivity between your present and future self.

You'll start making decisions that benefit future you.

Step 6: Take small asymmetric bets.

Asymmetric bet = small downside, huge upside.

Like Sam's $500 Bitcoin investment.

Find something you believe in that:

- You can afford to lose completely
- Has potential for 10x+ returns
- You can hold for years without needing the money

Invest a small amount. Then forget about it.

This trains your brain to handle volatility without panic.

The Timeline:

Sam didn't rewire his brain overnight.

He spent seven years (2004-2011) training his brain to:

- Delay gratification
- Ignore social pressure
- Think long-term
- Operate from abundance

By the time Bitcoin showed up, his brain was ready.

You can do the same thing in 12-18 months if you're intentional about it.

It won't be as deep as Sam's seven years. But it'll be enough to change your decision-making.

I know because I'm doing it right now.

After meeting Sam, I started:

- Downsizing my living situation (smaller apartment, lower rent)
- Selling stuff I don't need
- Building an emergency fund
- Visualizing 65-year-old me every morning
- Taking $200 asymmetric bets on things I believe in

And I can feel my brain changing.

The anxiety is lower. The impulsiveness is fading. The long-term thinking is getting stronger.

I'm not Sam yet.

But I'm not the guy who bought horses anymore either.

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you the biblical framework that guided Sam's thinking.

Because Sam wasn't just operating from neuroscience.

He was operating from something deeper: **a theology of stewardship.**

The Bible has a lot to say about money. Most of it contradicts what you hear in church.

And Sam understood it better than any pastor I've ever met.

Because he actually lived it.

CHAPTER 10
The Wealthy Janitor Framework

"Okay," I said to Sam. "You've convinced me. Stewardship, not poverty. Multiply, don't bury. Give generously. I get it."

"But?"

"But how do I actually *do* it? What's the step-by-step? What did you do that I can replicate?"

Sam smiled. "That's the right question."

He pulled out a notebook—the same beat-up spiral notebook he'd been using since 2004 to track his finances.

"Everything I did fits on one page," he said, flipping to a dog-eared sheet near the front. "The Wealthy Janitor Framework. Seven steps. That's it."

He slid the notebook across the table.

I looked at the page. It was written in blue pen, some parts faded from years of handling, some parts freshly added.

At the top, in all caps: **THE WEALTHY JANITOR FRAMEWORK**

Below it, seven numbered steps.

"This is it?" I asked. "This is what turned $500 into $8 million?"

"This is what turned $9,200 and twenty years of discipline into $8 million," Sam corrected. "The Bitcoin was just one piece. The framework is what made everything else possible."

STEP 1: MAKE YOUR HOUSING COST DISAPPEAR

Sam tapped the first line.

"Everything starts here. If you're bleeding $1,000+ a month on rent or a mortgage, you'll never build wealth. You'll always be in survival mode. You need to make housing either free or close to it."

"How?"

"Depends on your situation. For me, it was buying a $3,000 mobile home at a tax sale. For you, it might be different. But the goal is the same: **Get your housing cost below 10% of your income.**"

He showed me the math from 2004:

Income: $32,000/year = $2,667/month (gross) → ~$2,167/month (take-home)

Target housing cost: 10% of take-home = $217/month maximum

Actual housing cost:

- Property taxes: $32/month
- Water: $30/month
- Electricity: $80/month
- **Total: $142/month**

Under budget by $75/month.

"Compare that to renting," Sam said. "I would've paid $800/month for a crappy one-bedroom apartment. That's 37% of my take-home income. I'd be broke."

Options for making housing cost disappear:

Option A: House hacking

- Buy a duplex, triplex, or fourplex
- Live in one unit, rent out the others
- Renters pay your mortgage
- Your housing is free (or close to it)

Option B: Tax sale properties

- Buy distressed properties at tax sales
- Fix them up yourself
- Own outright (or nearly) from day one

Option C: Mobile home on land

- Buy cheap mobile home ($3K-$10K)
- Buy cheap land or rent a lot ($200-400/month)
- Total cost: $300-500/month, but you own it

Option D: Live with family

- Pay them fair rent ($300-500/month)
- Save the difference between that and market rent
- Build your war chest

Option E: Geographic arbitrage

- Move to a low-cost-of-living area
- Remote work from a place where rent is $500 instead of $2,000
- Bank the difference

"The method doesn't matter," Sam said. "What matters is getting your housing cost so low that it's not a burden. Once housing is handled, everything else gets easier."

STEP 2: BUILD A $5,000 EMERGENCY FUND

"Before you invest a single dollar," Sam said, "you need a buffer. Something that keeps you from panicking when your car breaks down or you get sick."

"How much?"

"Start with $5,000. Eventually, build it to 6 months of expenses. But start with $5,000."

Why $5,000?

"Because $5,000 covers most emergencies. Car repair? $1,200. Medical bill? $2,000. Unexpected expense? Covered. With $5,000 in the bank, your amygdala calms down. You stop living in fear mode."

Sam's emergency fund timeline:

2004: Started with $500 in savings when he bought the mobile home

2005: Built it to $2,000 by saving $125/month

2006: Hit $5,000 by continuing to save $125/month

2007: Grew it to $10,000 (2 months of expenses)

2011 (when Bitcoin arrived): Had $15,000 in emergency fund (about 7 months of expenses)

"That's why I could invest $500 in Bitcoin without panicking," Sam said. "I had $15,000 sitting in a savings account. If Bitcoin went to zero, I'd still be fine."

Where to keep it:

"High-yield savings account. Not the stock market. Not crypto. Not stuffed in a mattress. A boring, safe, liquid savings account that earns 4-5% interest."

Current options (as of 2024):

- Marcus by Goldman Sachs: 4.4% APY
- Ally Bank: 4.35% APY
- American Express Personal Savings: 4.3% APY

"The interest doesn't matter much," Sam said. "What matters is that it's there. Safe. Accessible. Ready for when life happens."

STEP 3: INVEST THE HOUSING SAVINGS (AUTOMATICALLY)

"Here's where wealth actually gets built," Sam said.

"Once your housing is handled and your emergency fund is solid, you take the money you're NOT spending on rent and you invest it. Every single month. Automatically. No excuses."

Sam's numbers (2004-2024):

Monthly housing savings: $650

- (What he would've paid in rent: $800)
- (What he actually paid: $150)
- (Difference: $650)

Monthly investment: $650 into Vanguard Total Stock Market Index Fund (VTSAX)

20 years of contributions: $650 × 240 months = $156,000

Ending value at 10% average return: $492,000

"That's the power of consistency," Sam said. "I didn't try to time the market. I didn't pick stocks. I didn't chase hot tips. I just put $650 into the same boring index fund every month for twenty years."

Why index funds?

"Because I'm not smarter than the market. Index funds own a little piece of everything. When the economy grows, I grow. I don't have to pick winners. I just ride the whole economy up."

Which index fund?

Sam recommended three:

1. **Vanguard Total Stock Market Index Fund (VTSAX)**
    - Owns basically every publicly traded U.S. company
    - Expense ratio: 0.04% (almost free)
    - This is what Sam used
2. **Vanguard S&P 500 Index Fund (VFIAX)**
    - Owns the 500 largest U.S. companies
    - Expense ratio: 0.04%

    - Slightly less diversified than VTSAX, but still great
3. **Vanguard Total World Stock Index Fund (VTWAX)**
    - Owns stocks from every country
    - Expense ratio: 0.10%
    - Maximum diversification

"Pick one. Set up automatic monthly transfers. Forget about it."

The Automation is Key:

"You cannot rely on willpower," Sam said. "If you try to manually invest every month, you'll skip it. Something will come up. You'll convince yourself you need the money for something else."

How Sam automated it:

- Set up direct deposit from his paycheck
- $650 automatically transferred to Vanguard on the 1st of every month
- He never saw the money
- It was gone before he could spend it

"Pay yourself first. That's the rule. The $650 goes to investments before it goes to anything else."

What about market crashes?

"Keep investing. Especially during crashes."

2008 crash: Sam kept investing $650/month while the market dropped 50%

2020 COVID crash: Sam kept investing $650/month while the market dropped 30%

"When the market crashes, you're buying stocks on sale. That's when you want to invest *more*, not less."

The math:

- 2008: S&P 500 dropped from 1,500 to 750

- Sam's $650 bought *twice as many shares* during the crash
- When the market recovered (2009-2010), those shares doubled in value

"Crashes are gifts," Sam said. "Most people panic and sell. Smart people keep buying."

STEP 4: MAX OUT EMPLOYER MATCH (FREE MONEY)

"If your employer matches retirement contributions, max it out. It's literally free money."

Sam's situation:

Lincoln High School district matched employee contributions dollar-for-dollar up to a certain limit.

2004: Match limit was ~$1,830/year

2024: Match limit is ~$3,300/year

Sam contributed the maximum every single year.

His contributions over 20 years: ~$50,000

Employer match over 20 years: ~$50,000

Total contributed: $100,000

Ending value at 8% return: $247,000

"I put in $50,000. The district put in $50,000. Time and compound interest turned it into $247,000. That's a 494% return on my money."

If you don't have an employer match:

"Then skip this step and put that money into your index fund instead."

But if you DO have a match:

"Take it. All of it. It's the highest-return investment you'll ever make."

Example:

- You contribute $100
- Employer contributes $100
- You instantly have $200
- That's a 100% immediate return

"There's no other investment that gives you an instant 100% return. Take the match."

STEP 5: LIVE LIKE YOU MAKE 70% OF YOUR INCOME

"This is the hardest step," Sam said. "Because it requires saying no to yourself. A lot."

The principle:

Spend no more than 70% of your take-home income on everything: housing, food, transportation, entertainment, everything.

The other 30% goes to:

- Savings (emergency fund)
- Investments (index funds)
- Giving (generosity)

Sam's budget (2011, before Bitcoin):

Take-home income: $2,500/month

Maximum spending budget: $1,750 (70%)

Actual spending:

- Housing (taxes, utilities): $150
- Food (groceries): $250
- Transportation (gas, insurance, maintenance): $200
- Misc (clothes, entertainment, etc.): $150
- **Total: $750/month**

Amount left over: $1,750

Where it went:

- Index fund: $650/month
- Employer retirement match: $153/month ($1,830/year)
- Emergency fund: $125/month
- Giving: $200/month
- Extra buffer: $622/month (saved for larger expenses like new roof, truck maintenance, etc.)

"I was living on 30% of my income and investing the other 70%," Sam said. "That's why I got rich."

How do you live on 70%?

Sam's strategies:

Food:

- Cook every meal at home
- Buy generic brands
- Shop sales
- Meal prep on Sundays
- Cost: $250/month (2011), $400/month (2024)

Transportation:

- Drive a paid-off vehicle
- Do your own oil changes and basic maintenance
- Don't buy new cars
- Cost: $200/month (2011), $250/month (2024)

Entertainment:

- Library (free books)
- Parks (free hiking)
- Home projects (fixing things is fun)
- Cost: $50/month

Clothes:

- Buy used when possible
- Buy quality that lasts

- Don't chase fashion
- Cost: $30/month

Total monthly spending: $750 (2011), $1,200 (2024)

"The key is finding contentment in less. Once you realize you don't need much to be happy, everything gets easier."

STEP 6: TAKE ONE ASYMMETRIC BET PER YEAR

"This is where you go beyond the boring index funds," Sam said. "This is where you take calculated risks on things that could change your life."

What's an asymmetric bet?

An investment where:

- **Downside is small and defined** (you know exactly how much you can lose)
- **Upside is large and unlimited** (potential for 10x, 100x, or more)

Examples:

2011: Bitcoin at $1.50. Sam invested $500.

- Downside: Lose $500
- Upside: Potentially millions
- Asymmetric? YES. Risk/reward ratio heavily favored upside.

2018: Bitcoin at $3,200. Sam invested $32,000.

- Downside: Lose $32,000 (about 1.5% of net worth at the time)
- Upside: Recover to $20,000 = $200,000 gain
- Asymmetric? YES.

2020: Bitcoin at $4,000. Sam invested $20,000.

- Downside: Lose $20,000
- Upside: Recovery to $60,000 = $300,000 gain
- Asymmetric? YES.

The rules for asymmetric bets:

1. **Invest no more than 2-5% of your net worth**
2. **Only invest what you can afford to lose completely**
3. **Do your own research** (don't follow hype)
4. **Have a thesis** (Why will this go up? What's the fundamental reason?)
5. **Be willing to hold for years** (Asymmetric bets take time)

"The mistake most people make is they bet too much," Sam said. "They put 50% of their net worth into something risky because they're desperate. Then they panic when it drops 30%. You have to size your bets small enough that volatility doesn't kill you."

Other asymmetric bets Sam considered:

- Early-stage startups (he passed—too risky for him)
- Rental real estate (he passed—didn't want to manage tenants)
- Emerging market stocks (he passed—too volatile)

"Bitcoin was the only asymmetric bet I took. And it was enough."

STEP 7: GIVE GENEROUSLY AND ANONYMOUSLY

"The last step is the most important," Sam said. "Because it's what keeps you from becoming a wealth-hoarding miser."

The rule:

Give away at least 10% of what you make.

More if you can.

Less if you can't.

But give.

Sam's giving (2004-2024):

Early years (2004-2013):

- Gave $200/month = $2,400/year

- Mostly to individuals in need (medical bills, rent assistance, etc.)

Middle years (2014-2020):

- Gave $500/month = $6,000/year
- Started funding scholarships and school equipment

Recent years (2021-2024):

- Gave $3,000-5,000/month = $36,000-60,000/year
- Major donations to scholarship fund, food bank, teacher assistance fund

Total given (rough estimate): $400,000+

"Why anonymous?"

"Because giving isn't about getting credit. It's about helping. If people know it's me, it changes the dynamic. They treat me differently. They expect things. I'd rather just help and disappear."

The paradox of generosity:

"The more I give, the richer I feel. Not because I'm getting anything back. But because generosity trains your brain to operate from abundance. When you give, you're telling your brain: 'I have more than enough.' And your brain believes you."

Neuroscience backs this up: Studies show that people who give regularly have:

- Lower stress levels
- Higher happiness scores
- Better decision-making under pressure

"Giving is the antidote to scarcity thinking," Sam said.

THE COMPLETE FRAMEWORK SUMMARY:

Sam flipped to a clean page in his notebook and wrote it out for me:

THE WEALTHY JANITOR FRAMEWORK

STEP 1: Make your housing cost disappear (get it below 10% of income)

STEP 2: Build a $5,000 emergency fund (then grow to 6 months expenses)

STEP 3: Invest the housing savings automatically ($500-1,000/month into index funds)

STEP 4: Max out employer match (free money)

STEP 5: Live like you make 70% of your income (invest the other 30%)

STEP 6: Take one asymmetric bet per year (small risk, huge upside)

STEP 7: Give generously and anonymously (10%+ of income)

"That's it," Sam said. "Seven steps. Follow them for twenty years and you'll be a millionaire. Follow them for thirty years and you'll be a multimillionaire."

"What if I'm starting from zero?"

"Everyone starts from zero. I started with $500 in savings and a $32,000/year job. You can start from wherever you are right now."

"What if I'm in debt?"

"Then Step 1 becomes: Get out of debt. Step 2 becomes: Build your emergency fund. Then follow the rest of the steps."

"What if I don't make much money?"

"Doesn't matter. The framework scales. If you make $30,000/year, you can still do this. If you make $200,000/year, you can do it faster. The principles don't change."

THE TIMELINE:

I asked Sam to map out a realistic timeline for someone starting today.

Year 1:

- Cut housing costs (move to cheaper place, get roommates, house hack, etc.)
- Build $5,000 emergency fund
- Start investing $300-500/month

Year 3:

- Emergency fund now at $15,000 (6 months expenses)
- Investment account: $18,000-30,000
- Net worth: $33,000-45,000

Year 5:

- Investment account: $42,000-70,000
- Net worth: $57,000-85,000
- Starting to feel momentum

Year 10:

- Investment account: $115,000-190,000
- Net worth: $130,000-205,000
- Officially in top 20% of Americans by net worth

Year 20:

- Investment account: $380,000-630,000
- Plus home equity, retirement accounts, asymmetric bets
- Net worth: $500,000-1,000,000+
- Millionaire.

"The first five years are the hardest," Sam said. "Because you're watching the numbers grow slowly and it feels like nothing's happening. But around year 7-10, compound interest kicks in. That's when it gets exciting."

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you what happens when you DON'T follow this framework.

When you spend everything you make.

When you chase get-rich-quick schemes.

When you operate from scarcity instead of abundance.

I'm going to show you my timeline. My decisions. My losses.

Because you need to see both paths:

The path Sam took (discipline, patience, boring consistency).

And the path I took (desperation, shortcuts, chaos).

One leads to $8 million and contentment.

The other leads to regret and a book written as a warning.

Choose wisely.

CHAPTER 11
Two Timelines, Two Destinies

I asked Sam if I could see his actual financial records from 2004 to 2024.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I want to compare them to mine. I want to see, year by year, where our paths diverged. Where you zigged and I zagged."

Sam thought about it. Then nodded.

"Okay. But only if you're willing to show me yours too."

Fair enough.

What follows is the most painful exercise I've ever done: laying my financial life next to Sam's, year by year, and watching the gap widen from a crack to a canyon.

2004: THE FOUNDATION YEAR

SAM (Age 30):

Income: $32,000/year as school custodian

Major decision: Bought mobile home at tax sale for $2,800 + $6,200 renovation = $9,000 total investment

Monthly expenses:

- Housing: $32 (property taxes)
- Utilities: $110 (water, electric)
- Food: $200
- Transportation: $150 (gas, insurance, maintenance)
- Misc: $100

- **Total: $592/month**

Monthly savings/investments:

- Emergency fund: $125
- Index fund: $500
- Employer retirement match: $153
- **Total: $778/month**

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $9,000
- Emergency fund: $1,500
- Index fund: $6,000
- Retirement: $1,830
- **Total: $18,330**

RICH (Age 36):

Income: $52,000/year as owner-operator trucker

Major decision: Bought 40 acres in Missouri for $35,000 (borrowed $15,000, paid $20,000 down)

Monthly expenses:

- Truck payment: $850
- Land payment: $400
- Fuel: $1,200
- Truck insurance: $300
- Food (mostly truck stops): $400
- Misc: $300
- **Total: $3,450/month**

Monthly savings/investments:

- None. Zero.

Year-end net worth:

- 40 acres: $35,000 (owed $13,000) = $22,000 equity
- Truck: $18,000 (owed $24,000) = -$6,000 equity
- Savings: $0
- **Total: $16,000**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $2,330

COMMENTARY:

We started almost even. I actually had more income than Sam ($52K vs $32K). But I was spending 79% of my gross income on expenses while Sam was spending 22%.

I thought I was winning because I owned 40 acres. Sam thought he was winning because he owned his home free and clear.

Turns out, ownership with debt isn't ownership. It's just risk.

2007: THREE YEARS IN

SAM (Age 33):

Income: $35,000/year (2% annual raise)

Major decision: None. Just kept the system running.

Monthly expenses: $650 (slight increases in utilities and food)

Monthly savings/investments:

- Emergency fund: $125 (stopped at $10,000)
- Index fund: $650
- Employer retirement match: $165
- **Total: $940/month**

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $9,500
- Emergency fund: $10,000 (maxed)
- Index fund: $28,400
- Retirement: $7,950
- **Total: $55,850**

RICH (Age 39):

Income: $48,000/year (freight rates declining)

Major decision: Bought a 2005 F-350 diesel for $28,000 (financed, $520/month payment)

Monthly expenses:

- Truck lease payment: $850
- F-350 payment: $520
- Land payment: $400
- Fuel: $1,100
- Insurance: $350
- Food: $400
- Misc: $250
- **Total: $3,870/month**

Income: $4,000/month

Shortfall: -$130/month (going into credit card debt)

Year-end net worth:

- 40 acres: $38,000 (owed $8,000) = $30,000 equity
- Truck lease: $0 equity
- F-350: $26,000 (owed $26,000) = $0 equity
- Credit card debt: -$4,500
- Savings: $0
- **Total: $25,500**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $30,350

COMMENTARY:

This is where I started sinking. Freight rates were dropping post-recession, but my expenses kept climbing. I bought the F-350 because

"I needed a reliable personal vehicle" but really I wanted people to see me driving a nice truck.

Sam was driving a 2000 Toyota Tacoma he'd bought used for $8,500 cash.

I was drowning. Sam was compounding.

2011: THE BITCOIN YEAR

SAM (Age 37):

Income: $38,000/year

Major decision: Invested $500 in Bitcoin (333 BTC at $1.50)

Monthly expenses: $750

Monthly savings/investments:

- Index fund: $650
- Employer retirement: $170
- Giving: $200
- **Total: $1,020/month**

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $10,000
- Emergency fund: $15,000
- Index fund: $70,000
- Retirement: $18,000
- Bitcoin: $666 (333 BTC @ $2)
- **Total: $113,666**

RICH (Age 43):

Income: $45,000/year (trucking + odd jobs)

Major decision: Quit trucking, bought horses for $14,000, started hobby farm

Monthly expenses:

- Land payment: $0 (paid off)
- F-350 payment: $520
- Hay/feed: $150
- Food: $300
- Utilities: $200
- Misc: $200
- **Total: $1,370/month**

Income from trucking (Jan-April): $3,200/month

Income from odd jobs (May-Dec): $1,800/month

Year-end net worth:

- 40 acres: $40,000 (paid off)
- F-350: $18,000 (owed $18,000) = $0 equity
- Horses: $14,000 (purchased)
- Credit card debt: -$8,500
- Savings: $0
- **Total: $45,500**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $68,166

COMMENTARY:

This was the year everything changed.

Sam invested $500 in Bitcoin and kept living his boring life.

I invested $14,000 in horses and bet my future on them.

By year-end, Sam's Bitcoin was worth $666. Mine hadn't foaled yet, so I had nothing to show.

If I'd bought Bitcoin instead of horses with that $14,000?

$14,000 ÷ $1.50 = 9,333 BTC

Even at year-end price of $2, that's $18,666.

But I didn't.

2013: THE FIRST BITCOIN PEAK

SAM (Age 39):

Income: $40,000/year

Major decision: Sold 166 BTC at $1,000 = $166,000. After taxes, netted $116,000.

Allocation of profits:

- GICs: $80,000
- Index fund: $25,000
- Taxes: $11,000

Monthly expenses: $850

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $11,000
- Emergency fund: $15,000
- Index fund: $110,000
- Retirement: $30,000
- GICs: $80,000
- Bitcoin: $167,000 (167 BTC @ $1,000)
- **Total: $413,000**

RICH (Age 45):

Income: $22,000/year (odd jobs, horse sales)

Major decision: Installed well for $13,000 (financed on credit card)

Monthly expenses:

- F-350 payment: $520 (almost paid off)
- Hay/feed: $200
- Food: $250

- Utilities: $180
- Credit card minimum payments: $350
- Misc: $150
- **Total: $1,650/month**

Income: $1,833/month average

Shortfall: -$183/month (debt growing)

Year-end net worth:

- 40 acres: $42,000 (paid off)
- F-350: $12,000 (owed $3,000) = $9,000 equity
- Horses: $16,000 (market value of breeding pair + 1 foal)
- Credit card debt: -$22,000
- Savings: $0
- **Total: $45,000**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $368,000

COMMENTARY:

Sam became wealthy this year. I became broke.

His Bitcoin turned $500 into $333,000. He cashed out half, locked in life-changing money, and kept the rest.

I dug a well and went $13,000 deeper into debt.

The gap between us wasn't closing. It was exploding.

2014: THE CRASH

SAM (Age 40):

Income: $41,000/year

Major decision: Held Bitcoin through crash (from $1,000 to $200)

Monthly expenses: $900

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $12,000
- Emergency fund: $15,000
- Index fund: $125,000
- Retirement: $34,000
- GICs: $82,000
- Bitcoin: $56,278 (167 BTC @ $337)
- **Total: $324,278**

RICH (Age 46):

Income: $28,000/year

Major decision: Sold first foal for $4,700 (after deducting delivery costs)

Monthly expenses: $1,550

Year-end net worth:

- 40 acres: $43,000
- F-350: $10,000 (paid off)
- Horses: $12,000 (breeding pair + 1 foal remaining)
- Credit card debt: -$19,500 (paid down $2,500 from foal sale)
- Savings: $0
- **Total: $45,500**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $278,778

COMMENTARY:

Sam "lost" $89,000 on paper (Bitcoin crash). But his total net worth only dropped by $88,722 because his index funds and GICs kept growing.

He didn't panic. Didn't sell. Just held.

I sold a foal and felt like I'd won because I made $4,700.

Meanwhile, Sam's Bitcoin was worth $56,278—111 times more than what I made.

But I didn't see it that way. I thought I was being smart and Sam was gambling.

2017: THE SECOND BITCOIN PEAK

SAM (Age 43):

Income: $44,000/year

Major decisions:

- October: Sold 67 BTC at $5,000 = $335,000 (netted $234,500 after tax)
- December: Sold 50 BTC at $19,500 = $975,000 (netted $682,500 after tax)

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $15,000
- Emergency fund: $20,000
- Index fund: $220,000
- Retirement: $52,000
- GICs/Bonds: $1,100,000
- Bitcoin: $1,000,000 (50 BTC @ $20,000)
- **Total: $2,407,000**

RICH (Age 49):

Income: $35,000/year (back to trucking)

Major decision: Sold last horse. Liquidated everything. Lost $23,500 total on horses.

Monthly expenses: $2,100 (renting apartment now, no more land)

Year-end net worth:

- Sold 40 acres for $45,000 (to pay off debt)
- Sold horses for $13,500 total
- Paid off credit card debt: -$22,000
- Bought used 2008 Honda Civic: $6,000
- Savings: $500
- **Total: $500**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $2,406,500

COMMENTARY:

Sam became a multimillionaire.

I became destitute.

He'd turned $500 into $2.4 million.

I'd turned $37,000 (horses + well + expenses) into $500.

When Bitcoin hit $20,000 in December 2017, Sam's phone buzzed. It was a news alert.

He looked at it, smiled, and went back to mopping the gym floor.

When I saw the same headline, I pulled over at a rest stop and cried.

2021: THE THIRD BITCOIN PEAK

SAM (Age 47):

Income: $48,000/year

Major decision: Sold 50 BTC at $65,000 = $3.25 million (netted $2.275 million after tax)

Year-end net worth:

- Mobile home: $35,000
- Emergency fund: $50,000
- Index fund: $520,000
- Retirement: $95,000
- GICs/Bonds/Cash: $3,450,000

- Bitcoin: $1,035,000 (15 BTC @ $69,000 peak)
- **Total: $5,185,000**

RICH (Age 53):

Income: $41,000/year (trucking)

Major decision: Started writing this book

Monthly expenses: $2,400

Year-end net worth:

- 2008 Honda Civic: $3,500
- Savings: $8,000
- Retirement (finally started): $4,200
- **Total: $15,700**

THE GAP: Sam ahead by $5,169,300

COMMENTARY:

Sam crossed $5 million.

I crossed $15,000.

The gap between us was now **329 times larger** than my entire net worth.

If Sam had never bought Bitcoin and only invested in index funds, he'd still be worth over $1 million.

If I had bought Bitcoin instead of horses, I'd be worth over $100 million.

But neither of those things happened.

Sam made boring, disciplined decisions for twenty years.

I made desperate, emotional decisions for twenty years.

And the results speak for themselves.

2024: WHERE WE ARE NOW

SAM (Age 50):

Income: $48,000/year (still working by choice)

Major decision: None. Just living.

Monthly expenses: $1,200

Current net worth:

- Mobile home + land: $40,000
- Emergency fund: $50,000
- Index fund: $492,000
- Retirement: $247,000
- GICs/Bonds/Cash: $3,200,000
- Additional investments (from Bitcoin profits): $850,000
- Bitcoin: $1,425,000 (15 BTC @ $95,000)
- Cash reserves: $180,000
- **Total: $6,484,000**

Rounded to $8 million when including unrealized long-term capital gains value

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RICH (Age 56):

Income: $44,000/year (trucking)

Major decision: Living in smaller apartment ($950/month rent), building emergency fund, following Sam's framework

Monthly expenses: $1,800

Current net worth:

- 2008 Honda Civic: $2,000
- Emergency fund: $5,200
- Index fund (started 2022): $8,400
- Retirement: $12,800

- **Total: $28,400**

THE FINAL GAP: Sam ahead by $6,455,600

Or, put another way: Sam is worth 228 times more than me.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON: KEY DECISIONS

Over twenty years, Sam and I faced the same choices. Here's how we each decided:

2004: The Housing Decision

Sam bought a $3,000 mobile home at a tax sale. No mortgage. No rent. This freed up $650/month to invest.

I bought 40 acres in Missouri with a $15,000 loan. Monthly payment: $400. Money available to invest: $0.

2007: The Transportation Decision

Sam kept driving his old truck. Saved $520/month that would've gone to a car payment.

I bought a 2005 F-350 diesel for $28,000. Monthly payment: $520. Because I "needed" a reliable truck.

2011: The Investment Decision

Sam invested $500 in Bitcoin at $1.50 per coin. Eventually turned it into $8 million.

I invested $14,000 in Gypsy Vanner horses. Eventually lost $23,500.

2013: The First Profit Decision

Sam sold half his Bitcoin at $1,000. Locked in $116,000 in profit after taxes. Kept the rest.

I sold my first foal for $4,700. Used it to pay down debt. Still underwater.

2014: The Crash Decision

Sam held his remaining Bitcoin through the crash from $1,000 to $200. Recovered and grew.

I kept bleeding money on horses. Sold more at a loss just to stop the pain.

2017: The Second Profit Decision

Sam sold most of his Bitcoin at $20,000. Locked in over $2 million in profit. Kept 50 coins.

I sold everything—horses, land, equipment—to pay off debt. Started over at zero.

2021: The Final Major Decision

Sam sold more Bitcoin at $65,000. Locked in another $2.3 million. Kept 15 coins as "lottery tickets."

I was back to trucking, trying to rebuild. Net worth: $15,000.

The Gap: From $2,330 to $6.45 Million

We started almost even in 2004. I was only $2,330 behind.

By 2024, Sam was worth **228 times more than me.**

Not because he was smarter. Because he made different choices.

Every. Single. Time.

THE BRUTAL TRUTH

Same starting point: Both of us were blue-collar workers in our 30s with modest incomes.

Same opportunity: Both of us heard about Bitcoin in 2011.

Same country: Both of us had access to index funds, employer matches, tax sales.

Different mindsets: Sam operated from abundance. I operated from scarcity.

Different habits: Sam saved first, spent second. I spent first, never saved.

Different timeline: Sam was patient. I was desperate.

Different outcome: Sam is worth $8 million. I'm worth $28,000.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM THIS EXERCISE:

1. The gap compounds.

In 2004, we were only $2,330 apart. By 2011, we were $68,166 apart. By 2024, we were $6.45 million apart.

Small differences compound into massive differences over time.

2. Debt is a wealth killer.

Every dollar I paid in interest was a dollar that could've been compounding in investments. Over twenty years, I probably paid $100,000+ in interest on credit cards, truck payments, and land payments.

Sam paid zero in interest.

3. Lifestyle inflation destroys wealth.

Every time I made more money, I spent more money. My expenses rose with my income.

Sam's income went from $32K to $48K over twenty years (50% increase). His expenses went from $592 to $1,200 (102% increase, but still absurdly low).

My expenses always matched or exceeded my income.

4. Patience beats desperation.

Sam could wait. I couldn't.

That's the whole difference.

5. The horse decision cost me $100 million+.

If I'd put that $14,000 into Bitcoin at $1.50, I'd have 9,333 BTC.

At the 2021 peak of $69,000, that's $644 million.

At today's price of $95,000, that's $886 million.

Even if I'd panic-sold half at $10,000 (like most people would have), I'd still have 4,666 BTC = $443 million today.

I didn't lose $1 billion by not buying Bitcoin.

I lost $100-800 million by buying horses instead.

THE SILVER LINING:

I asked Sam if he ever felt sorry for me.

"No," he said. "I don't feel sorry for you. I feel sorry for the version of you that didn't learn from this. But you're learning. You're changing. You're writing this book. That means the loss wasn't wasted."

He's right.

I can't get the money back.

But I can make sure you don't make the same mistake.

In the next chapter, I'm going to show you exactly how to start the Wealthy Janitor Framework today.

No matter where you are.

No matter how much you've lost.

No matter how old you are.

Because Sam's way works.

And my way doesn't.

The question is: Which path will you choose?

CHAPTER 12
Starting Today (No Matter Where You Are)

"Okay," I said to Sam. "I get it. You won. I lost. The framework works. But here's my question: What if someone's reading this book right now and they're where I was in 2011? Or worse? What if they're $50,000 in debt? What if they're 55 years old and haven't saved a dime? What if they feel like it's too late?"

Sam leaned back in his chair. "It's not too late. It's never too late. You just have to start from where you are, not where you wish you were."

"Easy for you to say. You're worth $8 million."

"And twenty years ago, I was worth $18,000 and living in a $3,000 trailer. Everyone starts somewhere. The question isn't where you start. It's what you do next."

THE FIVE STARTING POSITIONS:

Sam pulled out his notebook and drew five scenarios. Five different people in five different situations. All of them can follow the framework. All of them can build wealth.

"Let me show you," he said.

SCENARIO 1: THE BROKE COLLEGE GRADUATE

Profile:

- Age: 24
- Income: $38,000/year (entry-level job)
- Debt: $32,000 student loans
- Savings: $800

- Current net worth: -$31,200

The Mistake They're About to Make:

Rent a $1,200/month apartment because "that's what everyone does." Buy a new car with a $400/month payment because "I need reliable transportation." Start living paycheck to paycheck immediately.

The Wealthy Janitor Framework for This Person:

Year 1-2: Debt Elimination + Housing Hack

Month 1-3:

- Move back with parents (if possible) or get 3 roommates to cut rent to $400/month
- Keep driving the beater car (or buy a $3,000 used Honda)
- Put every extra dollar toward the highest-interest student loan
- Target: Pay off $1,500/month toward debt

Math:

- Income: $38,000/year = $2,600/month take-home
- Housing with roommates: $400
- Food: $250
- Transportation: $150
- Misc: $200
- **Total expenses: $1,000/month**
- **Left over: $1,600/month**
- Emergency fund: $200/month (build to $2,000)
- Debt payment: $1,400/month

Timeline:

- $32,000 debt ÷ $1,400/month = 22.8 months
- **Debt-free in 2 years**

Year 3-5: Wealth Building

Once debt is gone:

- Keep the roommates, keep the cheap lifestyle
- $1,400/month now goes to investments instead of debt
- Start index fund with $1,000/month
- Max employer match: $400/month

5-Year Result:

- Age 29
- Debt: $0
- Emergency fund: $15,000
- Index fund: $45,000 (3 years × $1,000/month at 10% return)
- Retirement: $18,000 (3 years × $400/month employer match at 8% return)
- **Net worth: $78,000**

From -$31,200 to +$78,000 in five years.

20-Year Projection (age 44):

- Index fund: $687,000
- Retirement: $380,000
- **Net worth: $1.067 million**

Millionaire by 44.

SCENARIO 2: THE STRUGGLING PARENT

Profile:

- Age: 38
- Income: $52,000/year (household)
- Debt: $18,000 (credit cards + car payment)
- Savings: $1,200
- Kids: 2 (ages 8 and 5)
- Current expenses: $4,200/month
- Current net worth: -$16,800

The Mistake They're About to Make:

Keep the $600/month car payment because "we need a reliable family car." Keep paying $1,600/month rent because "we need space for the kids." Stay broke forever.

The Wealthy Janitor Framework for This Person:

Year 1-3: Debt Elimination + Housing Transformation

Immediate Actions:

- Sell the financed car ($25,000 car with $18,000 owed = $7,000 equity)
- Buy a $7,000 used minivan (Honda Odyssey or Toyota Sienna) with cash
- Eliminate $600/month car payment
- Attack credit card debt with freed-up cash

Housing Hack:

- Research house hacking: Buy a duplex with FHA loan (3.5% down)
- Example: $200,000 duplex
- Down payment: $7,000 (plus $3,000 closing costs = $10,000 total)
- Save the down payment in 12 months by living ultra-lean
- Move into one unit, rent the other for $1,200/month
- Mortgage payment: $1,400/month (PITI)
- Net housing cost: $200/month ($1,400 mortgage - $1,200 rent)

Math:

- Saved from car payment: $600/month
- Saved from lower housing: $1,400/month ($1,600 rent vs $200 net cost)
- **Total freed up: $2,000/month**

Debt Payoff:

- Credit card debt: $18,000

- Payment: $1,500/month
- Timeline: 12 months to debt-free

Year 2-3:

- Debt gone
- $1,500/month now goes to emergency fund + investments
- Emergency fund: $500/month (hit $10,000 in 20 months)
- Index fund: $800/month
- Employer match: $200/month

5-Year Result:

- Age 43
- Own duplex with $30,000 equity (paying down mortgage + appreciation)
- Debt: $0
- Emergency fund: $15,000
- Index fund: $36,000 (3 years investing)
- Retirement: $14,000
- **Net worth: $95,000**

From -$16,800 to +$95,000 in five years.

20-Year Projection (age 58):

- Duplex equity: $200,000 (paid off)
- Index fund: $620,000
- Retirement: $285,000
- **Net worth: $1.105 million**

Retire at 58 with over $1 million.

SCENARIO 3: THE MID-CAREER PROFESSIONAL (LATE START)

Profile:

- Age: 45
- Income: $85,000/year

- Debt: $280,000 mortgage on $400,000 house
- Savings: $18,000
- Retirement: $45,000 (underfunded)
- Cars: Two financed vehicles ($850/month combined payments)
- Current expenses: $6,200/month
- Current net worth: $183,000 (mostly home equity)

The Mistake They're About to Make:

Keep the big house and expensive cars because "I've earned this." Keep spending $6,200/month. Retire at 67 with $800,000 and wonder where it all went.

The Wealthy Janitor Framework for This Person:

This one's controversial. But it works.

Year 1: The Radical Downsize

Action 1: Sell the house

- $400,000 house with $280,000 owed = $120,000 equity
- After selling costs (6% + closing) = $100,000 cash

Action 2: Buy a smaller paid-off house

- Use $100,000 to buy a small house in a cheaper area (or a nice mobile home on land)
- Zero mortgage payment
- Property taxes: $200/month (vs. $2,400/month previous mortgage)
- **Saves $2,200/month**

Action 3: Sell both financed cars

- Equity from both: ~$15,000
- Buy two used reliable cars for $15,000 total (cash)
- Eliminate $850/month in car payments

Total monthly savings: $3,050

New monthly expenses:

- Housing: $200 (taxes only)
- Utilities: $250
- Food: $600
- Transportation: $300 (gas, insurance, maintenance)
- Kids activities: $400
- Misc: $400
- **Total: $2,150/month**

Income: $85,000/year = $5,600/month take-home

Left over: $3,450/month

Allocation:

- Emergency fund (boost to $50,000): $500/month for 1 year
- Index fund: $2,000/month
- Max retirement contributions: $950/month

5-Year Result:

- Age 50
- Own home outright: $100,000
- Emergency fund: $50,000
- Index fund: $146,000 (5 years × $2,000/month)
- Retirement: $108,000 (started with $45K + 5 years of $950/month)
- **Net worth: $404,000**

15-Year Projection (age 60):

- Home: $120,000
- Index fund: $620,000
- Retirement: $390,000
- **Net worth: $1.13 million**

Retire at 60 with $1.1 million.

The controversial part:

"But I don't want to downsize! I earned this house!"

Sam's response: "You didn't earn the house. The bank owns it. You're just renting it from them with a 30-year lease. If you want actual wealth, trade the impressive house for an unimpressive one you own. Then invest the difference."

SCENARIO 4: THE BROKE 55-YEAR-OLD (LAST CHANCE)

Profile:

- Age: 55
- Income: $48,000/year
- Debt: $8,000 (credit cards)
- Savings: $3,400
- Retirement: $12,000 (severely underfunded)
- Renting: $1,200/month
- Current net worth: $7,400

The Mistake They're About to Make:

Give up. "It's too late for me. I'll just work until I die."

The Wealthy Janitor Framework for This Person:

Year 1-2: Radical Expense Cut + Debt Elimination

Housing hack:

- Find a room to rent in someone's house: $500/month (saves $700/month)
- Or: Buy a cheap mobile home for $8,000 cash (use savings + saved rent)
- Or: House-sit / caretake in exchange for free housing

Debt elimination:

- $8,000 debt ÷ $700/month (freed from housing) = 11 months
- **Debt-free in under 1 year**

Year 2-10: Maximum Savings Mode

New monthly expenses:

- Housing: $100 (if mobile home) or $500 (if renting room)
- Food: $250
- Transportation: $200
- Misc: $150
- **Total: $700/month (if mobile home) or $1,100 (if renting)**

Income: $48,000/year = $3,200/month take-home

Left over: $2,500/month (mobile home) or $2,100/month (renting)

Allocation:

- Emergency fund: $400/month until $15,000
- Index fund: $1,500/month
- Retirement (catch-up contributions allowed at 55+): $600/month

10-Year Result (age 65):

- Emergency fund: $15,000
- Index fund: $308,000 (10 years × $1,500/month at 10% return)
- Retirement: $125,000 (started with $12K + 10 years of $600/month at 8%)
- Mobile home/housing: $10,000
- **Net worth: $458,000**

Can retire at 65 with $458,000.

At 4% withdrawal rate, that's $18,320/year passive income.

Plus Social Security: ~$1,800/month = $21,600/year.

Total retirement income: $39,920/year.

Living expenses in mobile home: $700/month = $8,400/year.

Surplus: $31,520/year to travel, give away, or reinvest.

From $7,400 to $458,000 in ten years.

From "I'm screwed" to "I'm retiring comfortably."

SCENARIO 5: THE HIGH EARNER, LOW NET WORTH

Profile:

- Age: 42
- Income: $180,000/year (tech job)
- Debt: $45,000 (credit cards, car loan)
- Mortgage: $520,000 owed on $650,000 house
- Savings: $8,000
- Retirement: $78,000
- Monthly expenses: $11,200
- Current net worth: $171,000

The Mistake They're About to Make:

Keep living the lifestyle. "I make $180K, I should live like it." Retire at 65 with $2 million and wonder why they're not happier.

The Wealthy Janitor Framework for This Person:

This person's problem isn't income. It's expenses.

Year 1: The Lifestyle Audit

Current monthly expenses:

- Mortgage: $3,800
- Car payments (two): $1,200
- Dining out: $1,200
- Entertainment/subscriptions: $400
- Shopping: $800
- Childcare: $1,500
- Misc: $2,300
- **Total: $11,200/month**

Income: $180,000 = $11,500/month take-home

Left over: $300/month (essentially paycheck to paycheck)

The Fix: Cut expenses by 40% without sacrificing happiness

New budget:

- Sell $650K house, buy $400K house in same area (better school district even): $2,400 mortgage
- Keeps $130K equity after sale costs → Invest immediately
- Sell both financed cars, buy two used cars for $40K total (cash from saved equity)
- Dining out: $600 (cut in half, still generous)
- Entertainment: $200 (cut subscriptions)
- Shopping: $400 (needs only)
- Childcare: $1,500 (same)
- Misc: $1,400
- **Total: $6,500/month**

Left over: $5,000/month

Allocation:

- Pay off credit cards: $2,000/month (gone in 22 months)
- Index fund: $2,500/month
- Max retirement: $500/month

5-Year Result:

- Age 47
- Home equity: $180,000
- Debt: $0
- Index fund: $267,000 (includes $130K from house sale + $2,500/month × 4.3 years)
- Retirement: $136,000
- **Net worth: $583,000**

15-Year Projection (age 57):

- Home equity: $400,000 (paid off)

- Index fund: $1,250,000
- Retirement: $560,000
- **Net worth: $2.21 million**

Retire at 57 with $2.2 million.

Alternative path if they don't downsize the house:

Keep the expensive house, keep the cars, keep the lifestyle.

Age 65 result: $1.8 million net worth (mostly locked in home equity)

But they worked 8 more years for $400K less wealth.

THE COMMON THREAD:

Sam looked at all five scenarios.

"See the pattern?" he asked.

I nodded. "Housing."

"Exactly. Every single person's path to wealth starts with making housing cheaper. Not free. Just cheaper. Cheap enough that it stops being a burden."

The Housing Formula:

If your housing costs more than 25% of your take-home income, you're in danger.

If it costs more than 35%, you're drowning.

If it costs less than 15%, you're building wealth.

If it costs less than 10%, you're on the fast track.

Sam's housing cost: 5.6% of take-home income (2024: $142/month on $2,550 take-home)

My housing cost in 2011: 78% of take-home income ($2,800/month on $3,600 take-home after I quit trucking)

That's why Sam built wealth and I didn't.

THE TIMELINE FORMULA:

Sam wrote this on a sticky note and handed it to me:

Years to $1 Million = 1,000,000 ÷ (Monthly Investment × 150)

Examples:

- Invest $500/month → 1,000,000 ÷ (500 × 150) = 13.3 years
- Invest $1,000/month → 1,000,000 ÷ (1,000 × 150) = 6.7 years
- Invest $2,000/month → 1,000,000 ÷ (2,000 × 150) = 3.3 years

"This assumes 10% average annual returns," Sam said. "Which is what the S&P 500 has averaged for the last 100 years. It's not a guarantee. But it's a reasonable expectation."

The key insight:

You don't need to make $200K/year to become a millionaire.

You need to invest $1,000-2,000/month consistently for 7-13 years.

And the only way to invest $1,000-2,000/month on a normal income is to cut your housing cost dramatically.

THE ACTION PLAN (STARTING TODAY):

I asked Sam, "If someone's reading this right now, what's step one? What should they do today?"

He didn't hesitate.

ACTION 1: Calculate Your Housing Freedom Number

Take out your phone calculator right now.

1. What's your monthly take-home income? (after taxes)
2. What's your monthly housing cost? (rent or mortgage + property taxes + insurance)
3. Divide housing by income = housing percentage

If it's over 30%, you need to fix this. Immediately.

ACTION 2: Map Your Three-Year Path

Sam handed me a worksheet he'd created. It had three sections:

Year 1: Stabilize

- Cut housing cost (downsize, roommates, house hack, mobile home, whatever works)
- Pay off high-interest debt
- Build $5,000 emergency fund

Year 2: Build

- Grow emergency fund to 6 months
- Start index fund investing ($500-1,000/month)
- Max employer match

Year 3: Accelerate

- Live on 70% of income
- Invest 30%
- Take first asymmetric bet ($500-1,000)

"Follow that path for three years," Sam said, "and you'll have $50,000-80,000 in net worth. From there, it's just time and compound interest."

ACTION 3: Find Your One Thing

"What's the one expense that's killing you?" Sam asked me.

For me in 2011, it was the horses. $2,000/month between hay, vet bills, and debt.

For most people, it's one of three things:

1. **Housing** (too expensive, too big, too much debt)
2. **Transportation** (car payments on depreciating assets)
3. **Lifestyle inflation** (trying to look successful instead of being successful)

"Find your one thing," Sam said. "Fix it. Everything else becomes easier."

THE MINDSET SHIFT:

The biggest barrier isn't money. It's mindset.

Scarcity mindset says:

- "I can't afford to invest."
- "I need this car/house/lifestyle to be taken seriously."
- "It's too late for me."
- "I'll start saving after I pay off debt / get a raise / finish this project."

Abundance mindset says:

- "I can't afford NOT to invest."
- "My net worth matters more than my image."
- "I'm starting from where I am, not where I wish I was."
- "I'm starting today. Not tomorrow. Today."

Sam started in 2004 with $500 in savings and a $32,000/year job.

If he can turn that into $8 million, what's your excuse?

THE FINAL CHALLENGE:

Sam looked at me. "You know what you need to do now, right?"

I nodded. "Follow the framework."

"No," he said. "You already are. You downsized your apartment. You're building your emergency fund. You're investing in index funds. You're doing it."

"So what do I need to do?"

"Forgive yourself."

I felt that in my chest.

"You can't change the past," Sam said. "You lost the billion. You lost the horses. You lost twenty years. But you can't build the future if you're carrying that weight. Forgive yourself. Learn the lesson. Move forward."

He was right.

I can't get the billion back.

But I can make sure the next twenty years look like Sam's, not like my last twenty.

And so can you.

In the final chapter, I'm going to show you what happens next.

Not just for me.

But for you.

Because this book isn't about Bitcoin or horses or Sam's $8 million.

It's about the decision you make in the next 24 hours.

The decision that will either make you wealthy or leave you full of regrets.

The wealthy janitor didn't get rich because he was lucky.

He got rich because he made one good decision.

And then he made it again.

And again.

For twenty years.

You can start today.

The question is: Will you?

CHAPTER 13
The Next Bitcoin

"There's one question I haven't asked you yet," I said to Sam.

We were sitting on his deck behind the mobile home. It was early evening, late October. The sun was setting over the trees at the edge of his property. He was drinking coffee. I was drinking water.

"What's that?"

"What's the next Bitcoin?"

Sam smiled. Took a sip of his coffee. Looked out at the trees.

"That's the wrong question," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You're asking me to tell you what to buy so you can get rich quick and make up for lost time. That's the same thinking that made you buy the horses. You're still looking for the shortcut."

He was right. And it stung.

"So what's the right question?"

"The right question is: **Am I ready for the next Bitcoin when it shows up?**"

Sam leaned back in his chair.

"The next Bitcoin is already here. It's always here. There's always some new technology, some new opportunity, some new asymmetric bet sitting in front of you. The question isn't what it is. The question is whether you're positioned to take advantage of it when you see it."

"What do you mean?"

"In 2011, I was ready for Bitcoin. Not because I'm smart. Because I was prepared. I had no debt. Low expenses. An emergency fund. A steady income. Investments already growing. When Bitcoin showed up, I could risk $500 without it hurting me. You couldn't. You had debt, high expenses, no safety net. Even if you'd wanted to buy Bitcoin, you couldn't have afforded to hold it through the crashes. You would've panic-sold."

He was right again.

"So the next Bitcoin doesn't matter if you're not ready for it."

THE THREE TYPES OF OPPORTUNITIES:

Sam broke it down for me.

"There are three types of opportunities in life. And most people are only ready for one of them."

TYPE 1: THE SURE THING (Index Funds, Employer Match, Low Expenses)

These aren't exciting. They're boring. But they're guaranteed to work over time.

- Index funds average 10% per year over long periods
- Employer matches give you instant 100% returns
- Cutting expenses creates immediate wealth

"These are always available," Sam said. "They don't require timing. They don't require luck. They just require discipline."

Success rate if you do them consistently for 20 years: 100%

TYPE 2: THE ASYMMETRIC BET (Bitcoin in 2011, Early Amazon, Early Tesla, etc.)

These require:

- Recognition (you have to see the opportunity before the crowd)

- Courage (you have to act when everyone says you're crazy)
- Preparation (you have to have capital available to invest)
- Patience (you have to hold through volatility)

"Bitcoin was a Type 2 opportunity," Sam said. "It showed up in 2011. I recognized it. I had $500 ready. I took the bet. But I could only do that because Type 1 opportunities had already made me stable."

Success rate: Maybe 10-20% of opportunities actually pay off

But when they do: 100x to 1,000x returns

TYPE 3: THE LOTTERY TICKET (Get-Rich-Quick Schemes, MLMs, Penny Stocks, etc.)

These promise easy money with no work.

They prey on desperation.

They almost never work.

"The horses were a Type 3 disguised as a Type 2," Sam said. "You thought you were making an asymmetric bet. But really, you were gambling because you were desperate."

Success rate: Less than 1%

"Here's the key," Sam said. "Most people ignore Type 1 opportunities because they're boring. Then they chase Type 3 opportunities because they're desperate. They never get to Type 2 opportunities because they're never prepared."

"So what should I do?"

"Master Type 1. Then you'll be ready for Type 2."

WHAT IS THE NEXT BITCOIN?

I pressed him anyway. "Okay, but seriously. If you had to guess. What do you think is the next big thing?"

Sam thought about it.

"I don't know. And neither does anyone else. But I can tell you what I'm watching."

He pulled out his phone and showed me a note.

Sam's "Maybe" List (2024):

1. **Artificial Intelligence companies** (but not the obvious ones like Nvidia—the smaller ones building infrastructure)
2. **Quantum computing** (early stage, might be 10 years away, but could be massive)
3. **Longevity / anti-aging biotech** (if someone cracks aging, that's a trillion-dollar market)
4. **Decentralized finance platforms** (crypto's not dead, it's evolving)
5. **Energy storage** (batteries beyond lithium-ion)
6. **Water purification tech** (water scarcity is coming)

"But here's the thing," Sam said. "I haven't invested in any of these yet."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm waiting for the right entry point. And because I'm not sure which one is actually going to work. So I'm watching. Learning. Waiting."

"What would make you invest?"

"Same criteria as Bitcoin in 2011:

1. **Do I understand the fundamental value proposition?**
2. **Is it early enough that most people haven't noticed?**
3. **Can I afford to lose the investment completely?**
4. **Is the potential upside 10x or more?**
5. **Am I prepared to hold for 5-10 years?**

"If the answer to all five is yes, I'll put $1,000-2,000 into it. Not more. And then I'll forget about it."

THE REAL NEXT BITCOIN:

"But you want to know what I really think the next Bitcoin is?" Sam asked.

"Yeah."

"**Discipline.**"

I waited for him to laugh. He didn't.

"I'm serious. The next Bitcoin—the thing that will make you wealthy—isn't some technology you buy. It's the discipline to follow the framework. That's rarer than Bitcoin. That's more valuable than Bitcoin. Because discipline works every single time. Bitcoin worked once. Discipline works forever."

He pulled up a calculator on his phone.

"Let's say you ignore every asymmetric bet for the rest of your life. No Bitcoin. No AI stocks. No quantum computing. Just boring index funds."

The Math:

- Age: 56 (your current age)
- Monthly investment: $1,500
- Time horizon: 15 years (to age 71)
- Average return: 10%

Result at age 71: $620,000

Plus Social Security: ~$2,200/month = $26,400/year

Total retirement income: $51,200/year (at 4% withdrawal rate + Social Security)

"That's without catching a single asymmetric bet," Sam said. "Just $1,500 a month in an index fund for fifteen years. You'll retire with over $600,000 and a comfortable income."

"But what if I do catch an asymmetric bet?"

"Then you retire with $2 million instead of $600K. But you don't *need* to catch one. That's the point. Discipline alone is enough."

THE MISTAKE MOST PEOPLE MAKE:

"Here's what people do," Sam said. "They read a book like this. They get excited. They think, 'I need to find the next Bitcoin.' So they start chasing shiny objects. They buy some random cryptocurrency because someone on Twitter said it's going to 100x. They put $10,000 into it. It crashes. They lose everything. And they give up."

"That was me with the horses."

"Exactly. You skipped the boring part and went straight to the gamble. And you lost."

"So what should people do instead?"

"Start boring. Master the boring. Once the boring is working, then—and only then—take asymmetric bets with money you can afford to lose."

THE HIERARCHY OF WEALTH:

Sam drew a pyramid in his notebook.

BASE (Foundation): Type 1 Opportunities

- Low expenses (housing < 15% of income)
- Emergency fund ($10,000-50,000)
- Index funds ($500-2,000/month)
- Employer match (maxed)
- Zero high-interest debt

This is 90% of wealth-building. Master this first.

MIDDLE (Leverage): Type 2 Opportunities

- Asymmetric bets (small capital, huge upside)
- Real estate (if you can manage it)
- Small business (if you have a skill)

- Angel investing (if you have expertise)

This is 10% of wealth-building. Only do this once the base is solid.

TOP (Lottery): Type 3 Opportunities

- Never do these. Ever.

"Most people try to build wealth by starting at the top," Sam said. "They ignore the base. They chase the lottery. And they end up broke."

"The wealthy janitor framework is about building from the bottom up."

MY PERSONAL PLAN:

Sam asked me what I was going to do.

"I'm following the framework," I said. "I've already started."

Here's my current status (December 2024):

Age: 56

Income: $44,000/year trucking

Housing: $950/month apartment (21% of take-home—still too high, but better than before)

Debt: $0 (finally)

Emergency fund: $5,200 (target: $15,000)

Index fund: $8,400 (contributing $600/month)

Retirement: $12,800 (contributing $200/month)

Current net worth: $28,400

Goal by age 60:

- Emergency fund: $20,000
- Index fund: $48,000

- Retirement: $30,000
- **Net worth: $98,000**

Goal by age 65:

- Emergency fund: $25,000
- Index fund: $145,000
- Retirement: $85,000
- **Net worth: $255,000**

Goal by age 70:

- Index fund: $310,000
- Retirement: $180,000
- **Net worth: $490,000**

Plus Social Security: ~$1,900/month

Total retirement income at 70: $38,500/year

"Not bad for someone who was worth $500 three years ago," Sam said.

"Not $8 million," I said.

"No. But enough. And that's what matters."

THE ASYMMETRIC BET I'M WATCHING:

I told Sam I was also watching one potential asymmetric bet.

"What is it?"

"I don't want to say. Because I don't want readers of this book to buy it just because I mentioned it. But I'm researching it. Learning about it. Waiting for the right entry point. When I'm ready—when I have the capital set aside that I can afford to lose—I'll take the bet. Small. Maybe $1,000. And then I'll hold it for ten years and see what happens."

Sam nodded. "That's the right approach."

"But even if it goes to zero, I'll still be fine. Because the boring stuff is working."

"Now you're getting it."

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

If you're reading this right now, you have a choice.

You can close this book and do nothing. Go back to your life. Keep spending what you make. Keep living paycheck to paycheck. Keep hoping something will change.

Or you can start today.

Not tomorrow. Not next month when you "have more money." Not next year after you "get a raise."

Today.

Here's what I want you to do in the next 24 hours:

STEP 1: Calculate your housing freedom number.

Take out your phone right now.

- Monthly take-home income: $_______
- Monthly housing cost: $_______
- Housing percentage: _______% (housing ÷ income)

If it's over 25%, you have a problem.

If it's over 35%, you have a crisis.

STEP 2: Open a high-yield savings account.

Right now. Before you finish this chapter.

- Marcus by Goldman Sachs
- Ally Bank
- American Express Personal Savings

Open the account. Transfer $100. That's your emergency fund. Day 1.

STEP 3: Set up automatic investing.

If your employer offers a 401k or 403b with a match: Sign up. Today. Max the match.

If not: Open a Vanguard account. Set up automatic transfers. $100/month. $500/month. Whatever you can afford.

The amount doesn't matter. The automation does.

STEP 4: Cut one thing.

Not everything. Just one thing.

- Cancel one subscription you don't use
- Sell the financed car and buy a used one
- Move to a cheaper apartment
- Get a roommate
- Stop eating out for 30 days

Cut one thing. Save the money. Invest it.

STEP 5: Read this book again in 30 days.

I'm serious. This isn't a one-and-done book. This is a framework. A system. A way of life.

Read it again in 30 days. Then again in 90 days. Then once a year.

Because you'll forget. Your brain will slip back into old patterns. You'll start justifying expenses. You'll start thinking, "I deserve this."

Read it again. Remember the horses. Remember the billion I lost. Remember Sam's $3,000 mobile home.

And get back on track.

THE INVITATION:

I'm writing this book not as someone who succeeded, but as someone who failed and learned.

I lost a billion dollars because I was afraid, desperate, and undisciplined.

Sam made $8 million because he was prepared, patient, and consistent.

The difference between us wasn't intelligence. It wasn't luck. It wasn't even the Bitcoin.

The difference was the twenty years before Bitcoin showed up.

Sam spent those years building a foundation.

I spent those years chasing shortcuts, or not investing at all!

When opportunity knocked, Sam was ready.

I wasn't.

But you can be.

The next Bitcoin is coming.

Maybe it's AI. Maybe it's quantum computing. Maybe it's something we haven't even heard of yet.

It doesn't matter what it is.

What matters is: **Will you be ready?**

Will you have zero debt?

Will you have low expenses?

Will you have an emergency fund?

Will you have capital available to invest?

Will you have the emotional stability to hold through volatility?

If the answer is yes, you'll catch it.

If the answer is no, you'll watch it pass by. Just like I did.

This book is your warning and your roadmap.

The warning: Don't be like 2011 me.

The roadmap: Be like 2004-2024 Sam.

The choice is yours.

But choose today.

Because twenty years from now, you'll either be writing a book about the fortune you built.

Or the fortune you lost.

I chose wrong.

Sam chose right.

Now it's your turn.

Choose wisely.

EPILOGUE -THE LETTER

Six months after our last conversation, I got a letter from Sam in the mail.

Not an email. An actual letter. Handwritten.

It said:

Rich,

I heard the book is finished. Congratulations. I'm proud of you.

I wanted to tell you something I didn't mention when we talked.

In 2011, when I bought that $500 of Bitcoin, I was scared. I thought I was making a mistake. I thought everyone was right and I was wrong. I almost didn't do it.

But I did it anyway. Not because I was brave. Because I'd prepared myself to fail.

That's the secret no one talks about. It's not about being fearless. It's about being okay with fear and doing it anyway.

You asked me once if I had any regrets. I do. I regret not taking more asymmetric bets when I was younger. I regret not traveling more. I regret not telling certain people I loved them before they died.

But I don't regret the mobile home. I don't regret the old truck. I don't regret the boring investments.

Because those boring choices bought me freedom. And freedom is the only thing worth having.

You're going to be okay, Rich. You're doing the work. You're following the framework. You're building the foundation.

And when the next Bitcoin shows up—and it will—you'll be ready.

Don't forget: I didn't get rich because I was lucky. He got rich because I was ready.

Be ready.

— Sam

I taped that letter to my bathroom mirror.

I read it every morning.

Because Sam's right.

The next Bitcoin is coming.

And this time, I'll be ready.

Will you?

RESOURCES

The Wealthy Janitor Framework only works if you actually implement it. Below are the tools, resources, and next steps to help you start building wealth today—not tomorrow, not next month, but right now.

STEP 1: TRACK YOUR NUMBERS

You can't improve what you don't measure. Start here:

Free Budgeting Tools:

- **Mint** (mint.intuit.com) - Automatic expense tracking
- **YNAB - You Need a Budget** (ynab.com) - Zero-based budgeting ($99/year, worth it)
- **Personal Capital** (personalcapital.com) - Net worth tracking + investment analysis

STEP 2: OPEN THE RIGHT ACCOUNTS

High-Yield Savings Accounts (Emergency Fund):

- **Marcus by Goldman Sachs** (marcus.com) - Currently 4.4% APY
- **Ally Bank** (ally.com) - Currently 4.35% APY
- **American Express Personal Savings** (americanexpress.com/personalsavings) - Currently 4.3% APY

Index Fund Investing:

- **Vanguard** (vanguard.com) - Lowest fees, best for buy-and-hold
    - Open a brokerage account
    - Set up automatic monthly investments
    - Buy VTSAX (Total Stock Market Index) or VFIAX (S&P 500 Index)

Retirement Accounts:

- Check if your employer offers 401(k) or 403(b) matching
- If self-employed: Open a Solo 401(k) or SEP IRA at Vanguard or Fidelity

STEP 3: LEARN FROM THE MASTERS

Books That Changed My Thinking:

On Wealth Building:

- *The Millionaire Next Door* by Thomas J. Stanley - Proves that most millionaires are boring
- *The Simple Path to Wealth* by JL Collins - Index fund investing explained perfectly
- *Your Money or Your Life* by Vicki Robin - The psychology of financial independence
- *The Psychology of Money* by Morgan Housel - Why behavior beats knowledge (includes Ronald Read's story)

On Stewardship (Biblical Perspective):

- *The Total Money Makeover* by Dave Ramsey - Debt elimination + baby steps
- *Rich Dad Poor Dad* by Robert Kiyosaki - Assets vs. liabilities mindset
- *The Richest Man in Babylon* by George S. Clason - Timeless wealth principles

QUICKLINKS

RichAbbott.com

Millionaire Mindset (Paid Ebook - $19.99)
Discover Abundance and your real purpose in life.

The Prosperous Steward (Paid Ebook - $27)
Dismantling poverty theology and recovering biblical prosperity for kingdom impact...

The Abundance Algorithm (Paid Ebook - $27)
Deep dive into scarcity vs. abundance with neuroscience-backed rewiring exercises...

Your Million-Dollar Why (Paid Ebook - $19.99)
Discover how to find and monetize your purpose...

RichAbbottWealthCode YouTube Channel
Subscribe for free weekly videos on wealth psychology, mindset shifts, and practical strategies. Real talk, no fluff—just actionable content to accelerate your transformation.

The Wealthcode Newsletter on Substack
Subscribe for free weekly insights on wealth psychology, stewardship principles, and practical strategies. Learn how to build wealth without guilt or greed—combining timeless wisdom with modern neuroscience. Real talk, no fluff—just actionable content to accelerate your financial transformation.

Daily Transformation Tools
The Prosperous Steward Devotional — 30 days of biblical wealth-building principles combined with practical action steps. Scripture-based guidance for Christians seeking financial breakthrough through stewardship, not hustle.
The Mindset Architect Journal — 30 days of wealth psychology exercises and neural rewiring prompts. Science-backed frameworks for secular readers ready to reprogram their relationship with money. Each devotional pairs timeless wisdom with actionable daily practices. No fluff, just transformation—one day at a time.

Your transformation doesn't end here. It accelerates.

Join thousands of people building wealth psychology together.

Let's begin your transformation.
See you on the inside.

— RichAbbottMedia
   Rich Abbott

STEP 4: JOIN THE COMMUNITY

You can't do this alone. Surround yourself with people who are building wealth the right way.

Recommended Online Communities:

- **r/financialindependence** (Reddit) - FIRE movement community
- **The Mad Fientist** (madfientist.com) - Tax optimization + early retirement
- **Mr. Money Mustache** (mrmoneymustache.com) - Frugality + financial independence

For inquiries, coaching, or media requests:
Contact: **rich@richabbott.com**

The wealthy janitor didn't get rich because he was lucky.
He got rich because he was ready.

Be ready.